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The Human Tiger; OR, A HEART OF FIRE.

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FRISCO," "GENTLEMAN GEORGE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

"PLAYED OUT."

NIGHT had spread its sable mantle over the domes and spires of Chicago, for it is in that city—the young New York of the West—that this, our strange story, will find its verification.

Darkness, however, had not stilled into quiet the denizens of the ever busy city. The streets were thronged with people; lights flashed from the windows upon the moving crowd.

On the corner of Randolph street and Clark stood a roughly-dressed man, who, motionless as a marble statue, surveyed the busy scene around him. The stranger—for such apparently he was—was one whose age could not be read in his face; he might be thirty, or he might be fifty, yet no trace of old age appeared either in face or form.

Though dressed roughly—nay, poorly—yet one could see with a half glance that the man was a gentleman, both by birth and breeding, for "blood will tell," even in our eagle-guarded Republic.

The face of the stranger was singularly beautiful, although bronzed almost to the hue of the Indian by the hot kiss of the sun on the far Western plains, where civilization and nature contend for mastery in the persons of the settler and the savage. His features were regular and clearly cut; his long face, almost a perfect oval—pure type of the son of the south-west—with its massive and squarely-formed chin, piercing, dark-gray eyes, that shone jet-black at a distance, and the long, straight nose, gave promise of dauntless courage and an iron will. His hair was as black as the ebony locks of the red savage, the prairie-master, and he wore it long, curling down over his ears; a long, silken mustache, black as his hair, shaded his full, sensual mouth. In figure he was straight and strongly-limbed; and, had he been walking, a practiced eye would easily have guessed from his light, graceful step, that he not only possessed the suppleness of the wild-cat but also the muscular strength of that animal.

For dress the stranger wore a common dark suit; his rough cowhide boots incased a foot almost as small as a woman's. A black slouch

hat was pulled carelessly over his bronzed forehead.

Ex-lawyer, ex-duelist, ex-guerrilla captain and "ex-road-agent"—as the bandits who rob the mail-coaches on the far Western plains are called—Bertrand Tasnor was a man whom it were well worth while to look at the second time.

The story of Bertrand Tasnor's checkered life is briefly told.

Born in New Orleans, the child of a French creole and a Boston Yankee, he united the dash and fire of the Gaul with the thrift and caution of the Northerner.

Soon after Bertrand's birth his father died, and his mother moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, and resumed her maiden name, Tasnor. Hence it was that Bertrand bore the French name of his mother.

Bertrand, growing to age, studied for the law, and in due time was admitted to the bar. He was regarded as a "rising man"—as one destined to a bright future; but, a shadow came over his fortunes and clouded the brightness of that future.

In a quarrel with a brother lawyer—the only son of one of the first families in the "Rock"—he fatally wounded him and was forced to fly for his life; not from fear of the law, but to escape the vengeance of the enraged relatives; for the



"WELL, GOOD-NIGHT, DOT," BERTRAND SAID. A STIFLED CRY CAME FROM THE GIRL'S THROAT.

officers of justice look with a lenient eye upon homicide even now in our border States; but, at the period of Bertrand's flight, which was some eighteen years before the time of which we now write—for one to kill another in a street-fight was merely an accident, not a crime.

Bertrand's mother died soon after his flight.

Years rolled on. Bertrand's crime had been forgotten—lost in the lapse of time. The rebellion came. Little Rock was filled with armed men. Among them came one Bertrand Tasnor, a cavalry captain in the Confederate service.

Some few of the old citizens who chanced to meet with the dashing officer—for Tasnor's name ranked with Fagan, Marmaduke and Crockett—remembered the name, but in the silent and stern soldier they could not discern a trace of the young and gay-hearted lawyer.

More years passed on; the rebellion ended. But, at the close of the war, Tasnor disappeared as mysteriously as he had come.

In '69 a band of brigands—"road-agents," as they are termed by the settlers on the plains—appeared on the trail leading from Cheyenne to Denver city; and the result of their appearance was, that Wells, Fargo & Co., together with sundry passengers in their coaches, were robbed. A bold and daring band of "road-agents" were the robbers, who, though few in numbers, made up with dash and cunning what they lacked in strength.

For nearly a year, Captain Death—such was the odd title of the leader of the "road-agents"—and his band levied tribute on the Denver road; but, one bright morning, when swooping down like eagles from their haunt in the mountains upon a Concord coach, fondly expecting to "gather in" goodly bags of gold dust, and costly bricks of silver, they received, instead, a deadly fire from Spencer rifles in the hands of United States troops!

The "road-agents" had fallen into the trap laid for them by the managers of the express company.

Lead in lieu of gold or silver was not to the taste of the highwaymen, and incontinently they departed.

The soldiers followed in pursuit, mounted on the coach-horses, and the result was that but a single one of the "agents" escaped, and he was the leader of the bandits—Captain Death in person.

He was followed closely by the soldiers, and his horse killed by a ball from one of their rifles, but as he was near a wooded ravine, he managed to gain the covert and escape.

The soldiers paused in the pursuit near the body of the escaped brigand's horse. It was a jet-black steed, with a bright blaze on the forehead and four white feet—a noble animal, despite the jockey's saying in regard to the four white stockings.

The lieutenant in command of the soldiers had been a captain in the volunteers, and had beer with Steele in the retreat from Camden, after Banks' ill-fated expedition. In the dead steed he recognized an old acquaintance. It was the horse of the Confederate colonel, Bertrand Tasnor!

And Captain Death, the leader of the "road-agents," was Bertrand Tasnor!

Now, having followed the fortunes of Bertrand from New Orleans, in the year 1830, to Chicago in the year 1870, we will tell what brings him to the future metropolis, clad thus roughly and with so desperate a look upon the handsome face, which bore so few marks of the evil passions that reigned within his heart.

As he stands leaning against the lamp-post and gazing with an overcast brow upon the crowd that surges by him, he mutters to himself.

Listen.

"'Played out' that's the word, exactly; for the third time have I struck Chicago 'down on my luck,' as my English mate at the mines used to say. Well, I am 'down on my luck,' in truth. One single dollar in the world and not a friend in town! Here I stand in this big city, friendless, helpless. They say that the world owes us all a living. I've taken mine by force so far, but now it looks as if I was at the end of my rope. Rope!" and he laughed—a silent and a bitter laugh. "I wonder what suggested that to my mind? I've been near enough to the rope in my day, though I've hardly got enough left now to buy one to hang myself with. Why should I despair, though? I've been in tighter places. When the blue-coats had the very rope around my neck to swing me up to a tall cottonwood; when I faced the derringer of young Meehan, nigh twenty years ago; when that tiger-angel of a wife of mine, with her sweet, innocent face, golden curls and blue eyes, laid open my breast with a slash of my

own bowie-knife, I stared death in the face; but I have lived through it all. Never say die! that was always my motto. I'll stick to it now. I wonder if that blue-eyed beauty whose kisses were maddening in their passion, but whose nature was a strange compound of a woman and a tiger, is still alive; or, did the blow from my hand kill her? And our child"—the man's voice softened as he spoke—"is she alive? I fancy I can see her great gray eyes before me now; the eyes so unlike either her mother's or mine. If she does live, I wonder if she carries in her breast a heart of fire, like that of her mother?"

For a few moments the man was silent. Old memories—thoughts of the two years when he had folded to his bosom a woman with the face of an angel and the heart of a tiger, were with him, a haunting presence.

"It's getting late," he muttered, suddenly; "I must find some shelter for the night. Some cheap 'shebang' in Wells street will do." And toward Wells street he took his way.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAGNET'S POWER.

As the clocks were striking nine, a young man, pacing with slow steps down South Clark street, near Madison, was acting in a most eccentric manner. First he walked a little way down the street; then he came back again; then he halted on the corner for a few minutes; then he crossed over to the opposite side of Clark street, and walked a little way down on that side; then back again he came, and recommenced his pacing up and down as before; his eyes were constantly fixed on one point.

What was the object that possessed such attraction for the young man?

Behold a little fancy goods store and dressmaker's shop combined. The modest little sign over the door reads:

MRS. JONES, DRESSMAKER.

The window is filled with all the articles peculiar to a woman's wardrobe. No particular attraction in them to arrest the wandering eyes of a young man, unless, indeed, a young and pretty girl happens to be displaying them upon her person.

But softly! Beyond the window, in the interior of the little store, is the object!

It is the head of a young and beautiful girl—a maid possibly of seventeen, and with a face as fair and fresh as ever poet pictured.

A face not round nor yet a full oval; the complexion as pure as snow, yet with the creamy tint of the white, sun-kissed peach. The faint crimson hue upon the transparent cheeks told of health and strength. Her hair was brown, flecked here and there with rich golden tints as the flickering light played and danced upon it, as though even the gas-flame loved to toy with the soft, silken masses. A full, clear gray eye lit up the pure, innocent face as the sun lights up the dawn. As she sits beyond the window, we can see but the head, throat and shoulders, yet we can readily guess from the shapely throat, and the exquisite swell and slope of the shoulders, that the maiden's form approaches as nigh to perfection as does her face.

She sits by the window, sewing steadily, her eyes bent down upon her work, unconscious that for an hour or more eager eyes have been watching her—watching her with many a tender and longing look.

And who and what is he, who thus, like a keen-eyed detective on the scent of crime, haunts the vicinity of the little shop?

Born in Chicago; native to the soil; by name, Edmund Kelford; by occupation, an architect; he was the son of one of the old settlers of Chicago, who had prudently invested in real estate when the city was just beginning to expand from the swamp village into the metropolis of the West. The result was that, without exertion on his part, Kelford, senior, like a hundred others, woke one morning and found himself a wealthy man, simply through the enormous rise in the value of property.

His father dying, Edmund—an only child—came into possession of his sire's property, and found himself one of the richest men, not only in Chicago, but in the entire West.

Edmund Kelford was a gentleman by birth as well as by breeding, one of nature's noblemen. Frank and honest to

a degree; of a kind and genial disposition, he was a favorite with all. He did not indulge in the sports and dissipation so common to the young men of the age. Pure in mind, and honest in action, he had no superior in good reputation in the Garden City.

In person he was a fine-looking man of eight and twenty, with light-yellow hair, worn long and curling; full, blue eyes, and a manly and resolute face. Straight as a sapling in figure, he was also strong as a young colt.

And with all these advantages of face and figure, backed by a fortune almost princely in extent, the young man had fallen in love with a poor girl who worked hard for her daily bread in a little dressmaker's shop.

Over head and ears in love was he, too; one could easily guess that by his action. A man must love a girl deeply to walk up and down the sidewalk for an hour or so just for the pleasure of looking at her face in a window.

"She's working later than usual to-night," the observer muttered, as for the hundredth time he walked slowly by the window.

As Kelford paused on the edge of the sidewalk a young man, apparently about his own age, and with a carpet-bag in his hand, came up the street.

Kelford, in his abstraction, did not notice the approach of this stranger; he had eyes only for the charming face which had bewitched him. The new-comer halted and gazed in the direction indicated by the eyes of Kelford. His quick glance soon discerned the lovely face that the window framed. A good-natured smile came over his features. He readily understood his friend's mood, and glided up behind the young man.

"She is pretty, isn't she?" he said, with his face over the shoulder of the other.

"Sir!" exclaimed Kelford, the hot blood streaming up into his face, and turning, as he spoke, upon the intruder.

"Sits the wind in *that* quarter, eh, Ed?" cried the intruder, slapping Kelford familiarly on the shoulder.

The look of anger faded quickly from Kelford's face as he saw who had disturbed his devotions at the shrine of beauty.

"Why, Wirt, where on earth did you come from?" he exclaimed, heartily, grasping the other by the hand as he spoke.

Wirt Middough was a young man of about the same age as Kelford, with dark brown eyes and hair; a jovial spirit, full of life and fun. An orphan at an early age, he had been reared by an uncle, a wealthy lake captain, who had made his fortune in the grain trade.

Between Wirt and Edmund a frank and loyal friendship existed. They had been companions from boyhood, living side by side on Michigan avenue.

"Just back from the East," replied Wirt; "but, I say, Ed, how long has this been going on, eh?" And he pointed to the window as he spoke.

Kelford laughed, and the telltale blood fast crimsoned his cheeks at the words of his friend.

"As I came up I noticed that you were as motionless as a statue, and I couldn't guess for the moment what on earth there was in that window to interest you; but now that I see what is there, I don't wonder."

"Isn't she pretty?" cried Kelford, his eyes sparkling as he looked upon the face of the girl bent so steadily over her work.

"Yes, as pretty as Saint Agatha," replied Wirt, after an earnest gaze.

"And she is as good as she is pretty," said Kelford, warmly. "The more I look at her face the more I wish to."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Yes," replied Kelford, seriously. "For the first time in my life I am truly in love."

"Met your fate, eh, as the gushing writers say?"

"Yes, this girl is *my* fate. I'm serious about it. I am only on speaking terms with her, yet I am fully satisfied that I love her."

"You, a millionaire, in love with a girl who sews for a living?"

"There's no disgrace in honest labor in this country, thank Heaven!" cried Kelford, warmly. "But, come across the street to the shelter of that doorway, and I'll tell you all about it." He pointed to the opposite side of Clark street as he spoke.

"Go ahead."

So Wirt followed his friend.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOVER'S STORY.

Crossing the street the two friends gained the shelter of doorway.

"Now, then, we can speak freely and without attracting attention," said Kelford. "Two months ago, Wirt, I didn't know that such a person existed in the world as Pearl Cudlipp."

"What an odd name!"

"Yes, but the prettiness of the first makes up for the ugliness of the second. She is a pearl, too, as pure and as fair as that jewel," said Kelford, with a longing look across the street at the little window. "She must become my pearl, or I am undone."

Wirt laughed outright at this announcement.

"By Jove! you are in for it, eh, old boy?" and Wirt slapped his friend playfully on the shoulder.

"Yes, that's the truth," replied Kelford, a smile upon his fine features. "Rain or shine I have been here every night for the last month, excepting Sundays."

"And Sundays?"

"Sundays I sit at home all day long—dream of this girl's face, and wish that it were Monday," replied Kelford, with a mournful smile.

"Well, I never expected to see you in such a state of mind," said Wirt, utterly astonished.

"I never expected it myself," Kelford rejoined, slowly. "Not a single spark of that passion the world calls love ever entered my heart until my eyes fell upon this girl's face, and yet, at first, I did not like her. I thought her eyes too large, her complexion too pale, though then—as I afterward learned—she had just arisen from a sick bed; but there was something about her that attracted me, in spite of myself, to her side. The next time I saw her, her face pleased me better: and thus it was, I grew to like her more and more until, finally, I found that I loved her. Yes, Wirt, that's the word; I love her with all my heart and soul. To see those large, gray eyes look with love upon me—to hear those lips tell me that my passion is returned, I would give five years of my life." Earnest and deep were the tones that came from Kelford's lips. Wirt looked at his friend in astonishment.

"And yet you say you are but slightly acquainted with her."

"That is the truth," replied the lover, with a sigh; "I wish that it were otherwise. You know that my office is just around the corner in Washington street. One morning, just after breakfast, as I was preparing to come down-town, Mrs. Kelford, my aunt, asked me to get her some thread, and bring it up with me when I came home to dinner. This trivial request brought about my infatuation. The store I stepped into for the thread was that over there. The girl that waited on me was the one whose face has so fascinated me. I got my thread, paid for it, and took it away; with it I also took the memory of this girl's face."

"And that you didn't pay for," said Wirt, jokingly.

"No, you are wrong; I have paid for it—paid by many a sleepless night and many an anxious wish. This girl is more trouble to me than all my money. To continue my story; her face haunted me; I felt that I must see her again."

"Well, that was easy enough," interrupted Wirt; "all that you had to do was to go to the store and buy something else."

"That is exactly what I did do," said Kelford. "It is just two months since I first went into that little shop, and I have been back there forty times."

"Forty times!"

"Yes, and each time I bought something; some little article."

"Well, of all the ideas—"

"It was good, wasn't it? I've spent in that little shop about twenty-five dollars. The trouble has been to find articles to buy. Of course I did not wish the girl to suspect that I came there solely to see her and had no use for the stuff I purchased. Between each visit I thought of nothing but what I should buy next. You see the stock over there is such a small one for a gentleman to select articles from. I've bought pins of all sizes—a paper at a time. I believe I've got about ten papers now. Then I bought gloves, stockings—luckily they had a small supply of gentlemen's stockings—I bought all that there was in the store, so that they would be obliged to buy more, and so give me another chance. Then I provided myself with gloves; I bought

gloves for about sixteen relations—I invented them all for the occasion—all sorts of sizes. Finally, I was at my wits' end what else to buy, when I happily discovered a box full of spools of silk of different shades; so I've been laying in a supply of silk thread. I got to the end of the box to-day."

"That finishes your buying, then?" said Wirt, who had been heartily amused at his friend's recital.

"Oh, no. I've made a wonderful discovery. The spools are all different numbers. I'm going to discover that I've bought the wrong numbers in every instance, and go back and buy more."

"What have you done with all these things?"

"Got them all in my room up-town; they are very precious to me. I look at them every night just before I go to bed. They recall to me the memory of the woman that I love better than I do my own life. Each paper of pins, each spool of thread, each pair of gloves has some delightful memory connected with it."

Wirt was almost dumb with astonishment.

"Upon my soul, Ed, I never expected to see you in such a predicament. You, the cool, quiet money-bag—the 'Old Bach' as you are termed by about all of your female acquaintances, over head and ears in love with a poor shop-girl."

"That's honest truth, Wirt," said Kelford, smiling. "I told you that I was infatuated. Ah, Wirt, when a man of my cool nature does let the passion of his being have full sway, a raging torrent only can compare with it in force."

"And this is the history of your love affair with this girl?"

"Yes. I discovered that she was called Pearl Cudlipp, by the elderly lady who keeps the shop—Mrs. Jones, I suppose—calling her, on one occasion, Pearl, and on another, Miss Cudlipp, while I was in the store."

"Don't you suppose that the girl knows you are in love with her, and that she is the magnet that attracts you to buy all those ridiculous little articles that you have invested in?"

"I don't know," replied Kelford, thoughtfully; "she ought to have guessed the truth by this time, if she has ever looked into my eyes, for I can't prevent the love from showing there. Ah! see, Wirt; she's left the window; then she'll go home soon."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLAWS OF THE TIGER.

BERTRAND TASNOR proceeded leisurely down Clark street to Wells, turned into that street, and walked slowly along in search of some cheap lodging-place for the night.

He had not proceeded far when a sign blazoned on a lighted-up window opposite attracted his attention. The sign read:

KANKAKEE HOUSE.

BOARDING AND LODGING.

"Kankakee House!" muttered Bertrand, as his eyes fell upon the sign; "that reminds me of old times. It was in the town of Kankakee that I met her. Oh, what a woman that girl would have made if her heart had been only half as good as her face was fair! How the memory of that old time of passion comes back to me! How happy I was until I discovered that she was utterly worthless! If she had only been a good woman, how different might have been my life! At that time the road to good was as open as the path to evil. Her influence made me choose the last, and now what is the result? After eighteen years of crime, I find myself a broken, ruined man. I have made a dozen fortunes, and lost them as easily as I made them." And he knit his brows together gloomily at the thought.

"Why is it that evil seems to follow me? Has that woman cast a cloud over all of my life?" He paused for a moment after he put the question.

"I can't understand what brought her up into my mind to-night. I haven't thought of her for years; yet now, the old memory comes back as fresh as if it was but yesterday that we parted. That sign, too, reminds me of her. Bah!" and he ground his teeth together fiercely, "I am getting childish! Why should I think of her? She doubtless was in her grave years ago. A woman with the fiery, passion-

ate heart that she possessed was not suited for this life. Better for her, and better for the world, that she was out of it rather than in!"

Then he turned his attention to the Kankakee House. It was a common two-story frame building, the lower part occupied by a saloon. The windows were curtained, so that the interior of this saloon could not be seen.

"A quiet place, apparently," mused Bertrand to himself; "I think that it will suit my purpose well enough. To-night, rest; to-morrow I must plan for action. Who knows what may turn up to aid me? They say that when one door shuts, another opens; all doors appear to be shut to me, just at present. My chance may come, though. Now, let's see what the Kankakee House looks like inside."

Bertrand crossed the street, and entered the little saloon.

It was plainly fitted up; a little bar at one end, and a few tables for the drinkers arranged along the side of the room. The saloon was empty except that behind the bar stood a short, fat, gray-headed man, evidently well advanced in years. His swollen and bloated face gave good evidence of the power of strong liquors. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and had just mixed himself a glass of liquor when Bertrand entered.

"Can I have a bed to-night?" Bertrand asked, as he advanced to the bar.

"Well, I reckon I kin put you up hyar," said the landlord of the Kankakee House—for the evil-looking old man was the landlord—in a voice strong with the peculiar twang common to some parts of the far West.

"What will it be? I'm not flush with money," said Bertrand.

"We won't take your pocket-book, stranger," said the landlord, with a hoarse chuckle; "twenty-five cents will be the damage."

Bertrand gave the landlord a one dollar note.

"Have you any ale?" he asked.

"Yes;" the landlord gave the change; then called out: "Lurlie, glass of ale."

A door to the right of the bar opened and a young girl entered the room. Bertrand gazed upon her in astonishment; only once before in all his life had he looked upon such a face.

The girl was apparently but a child in years. Little in form—a mere sprite of a woman—quick and graceful as a kitten in motion, she seemed to glide over the floor rather than walk. Her face was as round as an apple, fringed by a profusion of short, golden curls that clustered tightly to her head in little spirals. Her eyes were large, and a deep, lustrous blue in color. The little mouth perfect in its shape; the full lips red as the carnation-flower, and pouting in that exquisite fullness that told of passionate tenderness. A little, shapely hand and foot showed itself from the sleeve, and peeped out from under the short dress. To sum up all, the face of the child or woman—whichever she was—was the face of an angel.

Well might Bertrand Tasnor—cool "Captain Death," as the desperate "road-agents" had termed him—be astonished at the sudden appearance of such a lovely creature, coming like a bright vision from paradise into the bar-room of the Kankakee House, evidently from its location and appearance one of the worst dens in Chicago, and that was saying a great deal: for Chicago, though perhaps not equal to New York in some respects, is no whit behind it in places of evil resort.

If Bertrand Tasnor was astonished at the vision of loveliness in the shape of Lurlie Casper coming so suddenly and without warning into his presence, she was equally so when she looked into the bronzed but handsome face of the nan who, by his daring, had won the name of "Captain Death."

In utter and speechless astonishment she gazed upon his features. A deadly whiteness came over her face; the blood deserted the full lips, and the ruby gave place to the tint of the opal; her eyes stared with a strange expression; the pupils expanded as in the eyes of the cat species when angry; the little white teeth were clinched firmly together. But for the support of the bar which she clutched, she would have fallen. Yet there was nothing apparently in the face of Bertrand to excite such emotion.

"Glass of ale for the gentleman, Lurlie," said the landlord, who did not notice the girl's agitation. It did not, however, escape the keen eyes of Bertrand.

With a great effort the girl recovered herself, and without

speaking left the room. Bertrand watched her keenly.

"Your daughter, sir?" he asked the landlord.

"Yes," answered that individual, a little gruffly, as if he did not wish to be questioned further upon the subject by a stranger.

"She's a beautiful girl," said Bertrand, who apparently did not notice the tone in which the landlord of the Kankakee House spoke, which was strange, for "Captain Death" was said to have a quick eye, and that few things escaped him.

"Pretty 'nuff," returned the landlord, shortly. He evidently did not wish to be questioned.

"About how old is she?" asked Bertrand, carelessly, as if he had no possible interest in the question, but had merely spoken for the sake of keeping up the conversation.

"'Bout eighteen." The worthy host was making his answers as short as possible; but the effort failed in its object if the intention was to keep Bertrand from pursuing the subject. Tasnor was after information; he had a purpose in view and was determined to accomplish it.

"As old as that?" said Bertrand, apparently in great astonishment.

"Yes."

"I shouldn't have thought it."

The landlord made no reply, but busied himself behind the bar.

Bertrand returned again to the attack.

"By the way, is her mother living?"

"No," replied the landlord, beginning to get out of patience with his guest.

"Your daughter takes after her mother, I suppose?"

"Yes," said the landlord, gruffly.

Bertrand left the bar, crossed over to a table by the wall and sat down. On the wall by the table hung a looking-glass. Bertrand glanced into it. It reflected back his bronzed features.

"Eighteen years have made a difference in my face, but then I am bronzed by the sun; and riding for four years, too, in the Confederate service, hasn't made me look any younger," he muttered to himself, reflectively.

Then again he glanced into the glass, which reflected the room back of him.

"What was the meaning of the terror in her face at the sight of me?" He put the question to himself absently, for his thoughts were wandering far away.

"Can it be her child? If so, then she is mine, too; but, if she be eighteen, she is too old; my daughter would be scarce sixteen. Pshaw! What a fool I am!" he cried, suddenly. "My girl had large, gray eyes, while the eyes of this one are like the eyes of Mildred; the eyes of an angel, but they can also sparkle with demon light."

The return of the girl with a glass of ale put a stop to Bertrand's reflections. He watched her narrowly when she placed the ale on the table before him. She did not appear to heed his searching glance. After placing the ale on the table, she returned to the bar.

On Bertrand's face was a puzzled look.

The features of the girl were pale as death.

Bertrand sipped his ale slowly; he could not understand this riddle. Suddenly his ear, trained to acuteness on the prairie, heard a light footstep near him; he glanced into the glass which reflected the room behind him.

Even his iron heart gave a sudden leap, for in the glass he saw the girl standing behind his chair. A keen-edged bowie-knife glittered in her hand, which was raised to strike him in the back.

CHAPTER V.

WIRT'S DEVICE.

WIRT followed the directions of his friend and looked across the street. As Kelford had said, the girl had left the window. In the back of the store she was hidden from view.

"She will go home soon?"

"Yes," Kelford replied, "she has worked later than usual to-night. She generally starts for home about nine."

"Where does she live?"

"Across the river, on the west side, in Halstead street near Madison."

"What is your object in watching her go home?"

"First, for the pleasure of looking at her. You've no idea how prettily she trips along the street; and, secondly, because fate may throw in my way, on her homeward path, a chance to become better acquainted with her."

Wirt looked inquiringly.

"It is just possible that some drunken fellow coming from one of the saloons some night, and seeing her—a young and pretty girl—alone and unprotected, may offer her insult."

"Ah, I see!" cried his companion. "In that case you will come to the rescue, floor the ruffian, offer the lady your arm, and see her safely to her own door, thereby becoming acquainted with her, and perhaps receiving an invitation to call upon her at some future time?"

"Exactly!" laughed the lover.

"Well, upon my soul, you are the queerest of lovers. You are actually wishing that your lady-love should be insulted by some ruffian!"

"But you understand the reason why, do you not?"

"What a pity that fate can't send the fellow, and give you a chance to accomplish your design. But, by Jove, I've got it!" cried Wirt. "Look at me," and he pulled his black felt hat down over one eye in a rakish manner. "I'm the ruffian!"

Kelford stared at his friend in astonishment, and shook his head. "It's a failure, Wirt; you don't look like a rough."

"Well, a Wabash avenue sport on a 'tear.' How is that?"

"Very good; but, your plan?"

"To lay in wait in some dark spot on Madison street till the girl comes along; then pretend to be a little 'how come you so,' and speak to her. You can be right behind her; step up; I'll apologize; you can offer the lady your arm, galivant her home, and win her eternal gratitude."

Kelford could not help laughing as Wirt developed his idea.

"I've a mind to try your plan."

"That's right!" cried Wirt, who dearly loved a joke. "If my memory serves me, there's a rather dark block about this time of the night, just after you pass Desplaine street. That will suit our purpose excellently. I'll just wait here until the girl comes out, so that I can see what sort of a dress she has on; it wouldn't do to make a mistake in the female, you know."

"That would be rather awkward!"

"Yes, particularly if she should happen to have some big brother behind her."

"In that case your friendship for me would cost you a thrashing," Kelford said, laughing.

"Not a bit of it!" cried Wirt. "As I heard the comedian, Dillon, say at the Museum one night, 'my legs have been too well brought up to see my body abused.' I can run like a grayhound."

"She'll be out soon. She wears a slate-colored dress and a waterproof—"

"You're well posted, ain't you?" rejoined Wirt, smiling.

"You're as bad as my governor; he's awful spooney, as the boys say, on some young female."

"What, old Captain Middough? Is it possible that he is going to marry at his time of life?"

"It looks like it," replied the other.

"Who is the lady he has chosen? Do I know her?"

"I don't think you do, or any one else, except the old gentleman himself. I fancy from some few remarks that he made just before sailing on his last trip, that his destined wife is, like your lady-love, a poor girl. He didn't say much, but the drift of his words led me to think so. He spoke about painted dolls—a fling at some of our acquaintances on the avenue—and said the only true womanhood nowadays was to be met with in the homes of the lower classes. Of course I agreed with him. I always let him have his own way as long as it don't interfere with me. Then, after a time, he spoke about the old marrying the young—asked if I thought a young girl could love an old man; of course, I saw instantly what he was driving at, and didn't commit myself. Then the very next day he asked me how I was situated in worldly matters, and told me, deliberately, that I mustn't expect too much from him, as it was just possible that he might take it into his head to marry some fine day; and the jolly old fresh-water sailor looked ten years younger, from joy, I suppose, at the prospect before him."

"Then you haven't any idea who the bride is?"

"Not the slightest; but I have a suspicion it is some poor girl that he's met with in his travels. Between ourselves, Ed., I expect my worthy ancient mariner will get taken in

and done for in his matrimonial speculation. Any young girl that marries an old man is either a fool or a schemer, I am no believer in a union between May and December."

"When does he return?"

"Well, his boat, the Michigan, is due this evening, I believe. She ought to be in now."

"There she is!" cried Kelford, pointing.

A slender figure, wrapped in a dark cloak, came from the door of the little shop, and took her way down the street.

The two friends followed.

CHAPTER VI.

A TIGER THAT SHEDS ITS SKIN.

As Bertrand Tasnor looked in the mirror that hung on the wall before him, and saw reflected there the glittering knife and the upraised hand of the woman ready to strike him, he felt that he was nigher death than he had ever been before in all his stormy career. Cold drops of sweat started out in big beads upon his forehead; he seemed petrified with horror; his limbs were powerless. In the glass he saw clearly the fierce blue eyes of the girl, now tinged black with passion.

The suspense lasted but a moment, although it seemed hours to the threatened man.

The girl saw that, by the aid of the looking-glass, her position was revealed to the stranger.

Quick as thought the expression of her face changed; the tiger became a woman.

With a low, musical laugh, she tossed the knife over the bar; the weapon struck the floor with a heavy clang.

The noise seemed to dissolve the spell that had fettered with its magic power the iron limbs of Bertrand. He wheeled around in his chair and faced the woman, who now stood smiling sweetly in his face. The pupil of the eye had contracted again, and naught could be read there but peace and gentleness.

"Only a joke, sir," she said, in the low, sweet voice that was so full of liquid music. "I only wished to see if you could be frightened easily. I knew that you could see me in the glass. It was a foolish thing for me to do, but I could not resist the impulse. I hope you will forgive me, sir." And she dropped a low courtesy as she spoke.

The landlord behind the bar, who had been transfixed by amazement at this strange scene, shook his head and muttered to himself:

"Cuss me, ef I didn't think the gal had gone crazy, an' was a-goin' for to stick him right in the back. Ef she had, he'd never knowed what hurt him, for Lurlie's got an arm jist like steel, little as it is," he said.

"A joke, eh?" said Bertrand, coolly. All traces of his late terror had disappeared. He surveyed the face of the beautiful, golden-haired sprite before him. There was a peculiar look in his dark eyes, but it was not curiosity that shone therein.

"Yes, sir, only a joke."

"Ah!" Now there was a peculiar sound in the voice of the ex-Confederate captain. The "ah" sounded like a sneer.

"You are very brave, sir," said the girl, looking cunningly in the face of the stranger, and trying the whole effect of her magnificent eyes upon him.

Few men had ever looked into the face of the woman called Lurlie Casper, without loving her. But the stranger seemed insensible to the play of the passionate eyes.

"Do you think so?" said Bertrand, carelessly, and looking into her blue eyes with as much unconcern as if they had been of colored glass. The subtle magnetism of the orbs was evidently thrown away upon the steel-nerved stranger.

"Yes, you did not move at all; you did not even wink. You must have looked death in the face many times to see it apparently so near without fear," and the girl came nearer to Bertrand, and rested her arm on the back of his chair.

"Possibly it was because I hardly had time to realize that I was in danger. Who would expect danger to come from a fair little hand like this one?" and Bertrand took one of Lurlie's hands within his own.

The girl shuddered, despite herself, when the bronzed hand of the "ex-Road Agent" closed over her taper fingers. She felt as if grasped by a corpse. A sickening sensation of fear crept over her soul. Her heart was chilled with

terror, yet it was a heart of fire, where passion's flame burnt unchecked and unrestrained. The white eyelids, fringed by the long, golden lashes, came down on the pale cheek.

A look of fierce joy—of triumph—glared in the full, dark eyes of Bertrand as he noticed this agitation.

"What's the matter, little one? Your hand trembles in mine," he said, in his cold, impassible way.

"Your hand is so cold; it is like ice," she answered, withdrawing her own from his grasp.

"A cold hand, eh?"

"Yes."

"That signifies that I have a warm heart—you know the saying?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe in it?"

"I do not know."

The girl seemed strangely ill at ease.

"What do you think?" Bertrand was curious.

"I have never thought about it," she said, simply.

"Ah, that is because you are so young; when you are older—when you fall in love with some dashing young fellow—then you may think about it; and mind, remember my words, a cold hand and a warm heart always go together." As Bertrand spoke he watched the face of the girl, covertly, not so she could detect his watching; watched her as eagerly as the eagle does the quarry that he is about to swoop down upon.

His words seemed to lift a weight from the mind of the girl. She breathed easier, and a quick flash of delight passed rapidly over her face. The keen eye of Bertrand caught the expression, and an odd smile appeared about the corner of his mouth.

"How old do you think I am?" she asked.

"It is hard for me to guess," he said, slowly; "the age of a woman is so difficult to guess sometimes. Why, I have met women of thirty-four who did not look a day older than a girl of eighteen."

Again the look of fear came over Lurlie's face as Bertrand spoke. Yet he uttered the words carelessly, as if he attached no particular meaning to them. But, again, the peculiar smile was on his face as he noted the effects of his words. The shot that he had aimed had struck home.

"But," continued Bertrand. "I should think that you were about eighteen, or perhaps not as old as that. Am I right?"

"Yes," she said. Again his words had lifted the shadow from her being that his former speech had cast there.

"I thought I could guess your age correctly."

"You do not feel angry with me for my joke with the knife?" she said.

"Angry with you? Of course not," he replied, quickly.

"I am glad of that, for I have taken quite a fancy to you, and of course I wish to be friends with you," and she looked up into his face again with the blue eyes, now so mild in their tenderness.

"Oh, we are friends—the best of friends," Bertrand said, smoothly; but there was a metallic ring in his voice that grated harshly on the ears of the girl.

The secret instincts of her soul told her that, despite his fair words, Bertrand Tasnor was an enemy and no friend of her.

"Let us be better acquainted," she said, in her simple way. "My name is Lurlie Casper; what is yours?"

"My name?" said Bertrand, with a peculiar look upon his handsome features.

"Yes, you do not mind my knowing it?"

"No, of course not. My name is Gilbert Smith."

The blue eyes cast a quick glance at him from under their golden lashes, but he did not seem to notice it; he, whose quick eye nothing escaped.

Bertrand drank his ale at a single draught.

"Now," he said, rising, "I should like to see my room. I am pretty well tired out, and shall sleep sound to-night."

The tiger look was in the blue eyes of the girl, as he spoke, but in a second it faded out.

"Yes, sir," she said. "Rick!"

In answer to her call a hunchback boy entered the room—a wee, little fellow, with a withered-up face and an attenuated form. Though puny and feeble in body, he apparently was not so badly off in mind, for the little yellow-gray eyes, that peeped out from the shock of bright red hair, that covered the head and hung low down on the forehead, had a gleam of intelligence in them.

"Rick," said the girl, "show this gentleman to No. 10."
 "Yes, missus," said the boy, in a shrill and feeble voice. Then he held the door open for the stranger to pass through.
 "Good-night, Miss Lurlie; I shall see you in the morning?" said Bertrand, moving toward the door.
 "Yes," the girl answered, a strange expression upon her features.

"Well, good-night, Dot," Bertrand said.
 A stifled cry came from the girl's throat; she reeled, and out for the support of Bertrand's arm, who sprung to her side, she would have fallen.

"What's the matter?" he asked, apparently astonished at the girl's sudden faintness; yet there was a gleam of triumph in his eyes that did not suit with his words.

"A sudden faintness—that is all," Lurlie murmured, with blanched lips. "What did you call me?" she asked, slowly.

"Why, Dot; you are a dot of a girl, you know," Bertrand said, with a frank and open air.

"I felt faint, just as you spoke; I—I did not hear what you said exactly, but I fancied that you called me by some other name than my own of Lurlie." The face of the girl, as she spoke, was as white as the face of one dead.

"It was only a fancy of mine, that's all. Good-night." Bertrand left the room, followed by the boy, a smile of triumph on his face.

The landlord had watched all with a curious eye.
 "He knows me, father! He will be my ruin!" Lurlie cried, with flashing eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

GUARDING AGAINST THE BLOW.

BERTRAND followed his odd-looking guide, Rick, upstairs. The hunchback carried in his hand a small coal-oil lamp, the light from which illuminated the entry, though but dimly.

As Bertrand followed up the creaky stairway, strange thoughts were in his mind.

"Have I acted prudently," he muttered, to himself, with an overcast brow; "prudently!" and a smile curled the corners of his mouth. "That's a strange word to come from the lips of Captain Death, as my poor fellows out in the mines used to call me. But now I am not in Colorado or Montana, but in Chicago; here I will not meet open force from my foes, but secret cunning. Was it wise then to let this golden-haired devil—for she is one—see that I had guessed her secret? I could not resist the impulse to call her by the old, old name. If she does know me—if that's folly; she knew me the moment she looked in my face. I could see it in her eyes, and by my cursed carelessness I have let her see that I, too, remember as well as she. I am in danger, then; now to prepare to meet it. I am in a trap here; she has all the advantages. I need allies. Where can I find them?" And as he asked the question, Rick, the hunchback boy, who had reached a turning in the narrow stairway, stopped and flashed the light full in the face of Bertrand.

"Look here, mister; there is a hole in the stairs here," and he pointed to it as he spoke. "If you ain't keeful, maybe you'll put your foot into it."

Bertrand mentally said to himself that he had probably "put his foot into it"—as the saying is—when he had entered the door of the Kankakee House.

"All right, my lad; I'll look out for it, so go ahead, Rick," he answered, to the boy's warning.

A gleam of pleasure flashed across the face of the hunchback when the stranger called him by name.

"How did you know what folks called me?" he asked, in astonishment.

"Why, didn't I hear the lady call you by name, and an odd one it is too?" Bertrand answered.

"So you did; look out for the hole, mister." The boy again went on up the stairway.

"I asked for allies, and fate has sent them to me, or at least sent one ally, and perhaps in this case, this one may be worth a dozen," murmured Bertrand, as he followed the boy. "This little fellow has a shrewd eye in his head; he's no fool, ugly as he is. Perhaps we'll have the old fable of the mouse and the lion over again? I will play the lion

in the net of the hunters, and this lad, who, like Atlas, carried a world on his shoulders, shall be the little, nibbling mouse to gnaw the cords and set the captive free. But, first, I must win him to my side. That will not be a hard task. The devil, who seems to have presided at my birth and since followed my fortunes faithfully, gave me the subtle gift of fascination. I have won strong men to peril life and limb for me, delicate and lovely women to give up home and friends and follow my desperate fortunes, and this hunchback boy shall be my follower too. By his aid I'll baffle this beautiful being, who has the face of Venus and the heart of Pluto. She will seek my life, I am sure of it, now that she knows who I am. She knows well enough that I have a good memory, and seldom let my debts of vengeance go unpaid. So, to prevent me from striking her, she will strive to be the first in the field and strike me."

Bertrand's musings were brought to a sudden end by the shrill voice of the hunchback. The boy threw open a door on the landing at the head of the stairs.

"This is your room, mister," he said.

Bertrand entered, the boy followed, and placed the light on the table.

The room that the two entered was small. In one corner was a little bed, the mattress covered only with coarse, gray blankets. A common little table, holding a tin can of water and a basin, with a single chair, comprised the furniture of the apartment.

"A small window by the head of the bed looked out into the darkness of the night.

Bertrand cast a glance around the room, then turned his attention to the boy.

"Well, Rick, this isn't the Sherman House, is it?" he said, in a cheery tone, seating himself carelessly on the foot of the bed, as he spoke.

"Not much, you bet!" replied the boy, emphatically.

"What does this window look out on?"

"The back yard."

"Let me see," said Bertrand, reflectively; "we are on the second-story, ain't we?"

"Yes, the second above the saloon," the boy answered.

"How far is it from that window to the ground?"

"'Bout thirty foot."

"Into the yard?"

"Yes."

"Any dog in the yard?"

"Yes, a big bull-dog—such a rouser."

"I suppose he would attack any stranger in the yard?"

"You bet!" cried Rick, decidedly. "He 'bout gobbled up a country chap from Peoria t'other night, wot got out there."

"What's his name?"

"Pete; but 'tain't no use fur any one fur to call him, 'cos if he don't know 'em he'd only fly at 'em ten times worse," said Rick.

Bertrand laughed quietly at the boy's speech. He saw that the quick-witted lad, who was not near as great a fool as he looked, had guessed the reason why he wished to know the name of the dog.

"You are bright, my lad, to guess a man's thoughts so quickly."

The boy smiled at the compliment. Kind words were rare to him.

"Is there any other door to this room?" Bertrand asked.

The boy hesitated a moment before he answered the question.

"No, mister," he said, at length.

"He is lying now," Bertrand said to himself. "I must win his confidence."

"By the way, Rick, I'm thirsty; can you get me about a pint of ale?" he said, aloud, and taking a ten-cent "stamp" from his pocket-book.

"Yes, mister." Rick took the money and left the room.

After the door closed behind the hunchback, Bertrand rose and commenced an examination of the apartment. Carefully he scrutinized all the walls.

"The boy was speaking truth, after all," he said, when he had completed his search, and stood leaning on the table; "there is no other door, yet I could have sworn that he was speaking falsely. But, let me examine this door." A single glance showed him that it had a stout bolt upon it. He closed it and shot the bolt into its socket. It held the door firmly.

"Nothing wrong about that," he said; "no other door

either, and this one can not be forced without making son-noise. I can not understand it," he said, softly and thought fully. "I have a presentiment that, if I go to sleep upon that bed to-night, I shall wake either in heaven or in the lower place—most probably the latter, if the doctrines that the ministers preach be true. But, to murder me my assassin must first get into the room—get into it without alarming me—for the assassin that will seek my life knows that it is my custom to go armed; but now I haven't even a penknife upon me. One by one I have parted with my weapons that I might live. My bowie-knife kept me two days, my revolver a whole week, and now I am in the hands of the Philistines, helpless. But my foe doesn't know that I am weaponless. The game will be to enter this room without waking me; how can that be done?"

For a few minutes Bertrand puzzled over the question. His eyes wandered around the walls seeking an answer.

"By Jove! I have it!" he cried, at last. "No door in the wall, but perhaps a trap-door in the floor. Now for another search."

Bertrand examined the floor thoroughly, even moving the bed from its place, but no dark lines denoting the presence of a trap-door met his eye. He knitted his brows in anger. Captain Death did not like to be beaten.

"Ah, this puzzles me!" he exclaimed; "the walls do not conceal a secret entrance, nor the floor; perhaps the ceiling may."

But the low, whitewashed ceiling that met his eye was as free from suspicious circumstances as the wall or floor.

"Bah! I am baffled!" he cried, a tinge of anger in his voice; then he resumed his former seat on the foot of the bed. "The boy though, may know, and if so, he shall speak."

Hardly had the words died away when Rick entered with a pitcher of ale and a glass.

"Only one glass?" cried Bertrand, as the boy closed the door, after depositing the articles on the table.

"One!" exclaimed the hunchback, in astonishment; "why, you don't want to drink out of two glasses at the same time, do you, mister?"

"No, the other glass is for you, my little man," replied Bertrand.

"What! me drink with you?" Rick cried, in amazement.

"Of course," Bertrand filled up the glass, and offered it to the boy. "Come, drink."

"Arter you, mister," said Rick, delighted at the honor.

"No, you first. I am the host, you the guest, and should drink first!" exclaimed Bertrand.

The hunchback drained the glass.

Bertrand watched him keenly.

"And now tell me, is there not some secret way of getting into this room?"

"Yes," answered the hunchback, in a whisper.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER THE MOON.

WITH a light, graceful step the young girl—whom the two watchers on the opposite sidewalk had marked leaving the store—proceeded up Clark street to Madison, then turned into that street.

Kelford and Wirt had followed in pursuit. On turning into Madison street, however, they took the other sidewalk, instead of following directly in the footsteps of the girl. By this plan they were able to keep her in sight, without letting her discover that she was followed.

Not many people were using Madison street as a thoroughfare, for it was getting late, and the street was almost deserted.

The girl passed onward, as if in a hurry to reach her home.

"When we reach the bridge I'll get on ahead of her," Wirt said, and both he and Kelford quickened their pace.

Wirt hurried over the bridge, and soon was half a block or so in advance of the girl. Then he crossed the street, walked on until he passed Desplaine street, and then selected a dark place in the middle of the block, and waited for the girl to come.

She was coming on rapidly, and had little idea that she had been followed all the way from her place of toil. She

had worked later than usual, and though she felt but little apprehension of being molested on her homeward path, yet still, as the hour was so late, she was walking as fast as possible.

Kelford was quite close behind her, ready to play his part in the coming tableau, yet he had little faith in the device of his friend.

After crossing Desplaine street, Kelford perceived Wirt coming down the street in a very erratic style. He was occupying all the sidewalk, from the houses to the curbstone.

Kelford could not help smiling as he watched his ally rolling along.

The girl, too, noticed the approach of the man apparently so much under the influence of John Barleycorn's distillments. For a second she paused, and hesitated whether to go on or retreat; but as the drunken stranger was minding his own business, and was apparently too much occupied in keeping erect to notice any one, she determined to proceed.

But on approaching the reeling fellow he headed directly for her.

The girl stopped in affright. What to do she knew not.

The street was almost deserted, but she heard the footsteps of Kelford approaching behind her. Quickly she turned her head, as if to call to him for assistance.

Wirt laughed in his sleeve when he perceived this evident intention. The game was half won before a move had been made. Wirt saw plainly that all he had to do would be to speak, and the lady would gladly accept the protection of his friend.

"Why, Miss Splinter, how y' do? 'Low me to offer my 'tection," Wirt said, in capital imitation of a drunken man, reeling up to the girl with outstretched hand.

"Sir!" exclaimed the girl, half in anger and half in fright.

"Don't 'pologize; I 'scuse you," said Wirt with true drunken gravity, and making another dive toward the girl.

Kelford at this moment arrived upon the scene.

"You have made some mistake, sir," he said, hardly able to keep a sober face on as he watched the comical attitudes of Wirt.

"What you know 'bout it, eh? I'm a gen'leman—a first-class gen'leman, you bet! How's that for high?" and he made a lurch against Kelford as he spoke.

Pearl anticipating trouble, pressed timidly to the side of Kelford.

"Oh, please tell him, sir, that he has made a mistake, and that I do not know him," she said to Kelford, quickly.

"With the greatest of pleasure," he replied, and then turned to the supposed drunkard: "This lady says that you have made a mistake, and that she does not know you."

"Don't know me—hic! Ain't she Miss Splinter—you know—Miss Splinter, of Milwaukee—make first-rate lager there—hic! Jus' lieve drink with you as any other man—double six!" and he reeled against Kelford again, who quietly replaced him on his legs.

"No, sir, this is not Miss Splinter."

"'Tain't Miss Splinter—hic! I 'cept your 'pology. If I've done any thin' I ought to be sorry for—hic—I'm glad of it, you bet—shoo fly!" And Wirt, with unsteady steps, departed.

"Will you let me offer you my arm as far as your home, Miss Cudlipp?" said Kelford, his tone too earnest, in spite of his efforts to render the question a commonplace one.

For a moment the girl seemed to hesitate. Kelford lost hope.

"Lemme see you home!" bawled Wirt, who had halted a little way down the street, and was watching for evidence of the success of his plan. He noticed that the girl hesitated, and thought that perhaps the fear of his return would induce her to accept the offer of his friend.

Wirt had judged rightly, for the moment the tones of his voice fell on the ear of the girl, she started with apprehension.

"If it will not give you too much trouble," she said, quickly, and taking the proffered arm.

"None in the least," replied Kelford, happy beyond measure as he walked up the street with the girl he loved.

The light pressure of the plump little arm upon his sent a thrill of joy dancing through every vein.

"You remember me, do you not, Miss Cudlipp?" he asked, as they walked onward.

"Yes," she said, after a moment's hesitation; "but how did you know my name?"

"I leard you called by your name in the shop."

"Oh, yes; how stupid I was not to guess that!" she said, quickly.

"But let me introduce myself, now that I've had the pleasure of meeting you outside of the shop. I hope you will not consider a formal introduction necessary?"

"No, of course not," she answered.

"My name is Edmund Kelford."

"Do you live on the west side?"

There was a peculiar look in the girl's eyes as she asked the question.

"No," replied Kelford, after hesitating for a moment. "I came over with a friend, and I am glad that I did so, since it has procured me the pleasure of your acquaintance. You are out quite late to-night."

"Yes; I worked later than usual," she said; "but here is my street." They had just crossed Halstead. "My home is only a few steps down the street."

"Do you live with your parents?"

"No; I am an orphan."

"An orphan!" exclaimed the young man, and in his heart came the wish to be father, mother, brother, husband—all to the sweet young girl, who looked so lovely in the clear moonlight.

"Yes, I am an orphan; not only that, but I am a foundling. I never knew either my father or mother. I was deserted by my parents when I was an infant, was reared by charity, and have not a relative in the world that I know of."

"What a sad story!" exclaimed the young man, impulsively. "But who gave you your name?"

"The people who took care of me. They were English, and gave me their own name—treated me as a daughter."

"Are these the people that you live with here?"

"Yes."

"You have hardly missed your own parents, then."

"I have not missed them at all."

"I hope, Miss Cudlipp, that you will permit our acquaintance to continue beyond this meeting to-night; that at some future time you will permit me to call upon you," he said, eagerly.

"And you are willing to call upon me now that you know that I am friendless and alone in the world?" she asked, an earnest look in the great gray eyes.

"What difference can that make to me? May I come?"

"Yes," the girl answered, slowly, and dropping her eyes from his earnest gaze.

"Good-night, then!" he said, while joy danced merrily in his eyes.

A single pressure of hands and he was gone.

Pearl leaned on the fence-post, and with thoughtful, wishful eyes watched him, the moonbeams glancing down upon her shapely little head.

CHAPTER IX.

BERTRAND FASCINATES RICK.

A SMILE of pleasure came over the bronzed face of Bertrand as the boy confirmed his suspicions respecting a secret entrance to the room which had been assigned to him.

"Ah! there is a way then of getting into this room without using the door?" he said.

"Yes," replied the boy.

"Where is it?"

"Have you hunted for it?" asked the boy, with a cunning leer.

"Yes."

"And didn't find it?"

"Your guess is right. I have not discovered it, yet I have examined the walls, the ceiling and the floor, thoroughly," replied Bertrand, who was puzzled that the secret mode of entry into his room had escaped his search.

"Look here," said the hunchback, rising from his seat; then he moved the little table away from the wall.

The walls of the room were hung with common striped paper.

The table removed, the hunchback pointed to a dark line on the wall that the table had hid from Bertrand's search. The dark line ran along the wall, about three feet from the floor.

"That's the top of the door," said the boy, pointing to the faint, dark line as he spoke.

"It is a little door, then?"

"Yes; 'bout two foot wide, and 'bout three foot high."

"Where does it lead to?"

"Into the next room; it's a bedroom just like this."

"Is the door fastened on the other side?"

"Yes, a little bolt; anybody wouldn't notice it, 'cos there's a piece of paper over it, same kind of paper that's on the wall," the boy answered.

"Then in the middle of the night any one that knew of the existence of this door, could easily get into this room without waking me?"

"Just so, mister," the hunchback replied, with a grin.

"That's pleasant," said Bertrand, thoughtfully, half to himself.

The hunchback watched him sharply, with his keen little eyes.

For a few moments Bertrand was silent. He was busy in thought, planning how to parry the blow that he felt would be dealt him in the still hours of the night that were approaching so rapidly.

"Well," he said, at length, "move the table back again, Rick, and we'll finish the ale."

The boy obeyed the command and replaced the table.

Bertrand drank a glass of the ale, then refilled the glass and passed it over to the hunchback. The face of the boy fully expressed the pleasure that he felt in being treated in this familiar way. Bertrand had fascinated the hunchback.

As Bertrand passed the glass over to the boy his eyes fell upon the lamp that, burning upon the table, lighted up the room. Only a small quantity of oil was in that lamp, hardly enough to last another hour.

"Not much oil here, Rick," he said, holding up the light; "an hour or so and I shall be in darkness."

"You can light the gas," replied the boy.

"Is there gas here?"

"Yes," and the hunchback pointed to the head of the bed; above the headboard, Bertrand saw the gas-burner. His previous scrutiny had not extended to that part of the room.

"That is excellent!" cried Bertrand, with an air of satisfaction. The location of the gas-burner suited his purpose admirably. In repose on the bed he could easily reach the gas-burner with his hand, and should any thing suspicious occur during the night, a single movement of the hand and he could illuminate the apartment with a flood of light.

"If I only had a weapon now, I would defy the malice of this she-devil," he murmured, to himself. Then a bright thought struck him, possibly the hunchback might possess a weapon of some sort. He resolved to act upon that supposition.

"Rick, do you know that I am afraid to-night?" he said.

The boy stared in astonishment; in his own mind he had set the stranger down as a man of dauntless courage.

"Yes, afraid," repeated Bertrand.

"Of what, mister?" asked the boy, in wonder.

"That is exactly what I do not know," replied Bertrand.

"My fear is a nameless one, but if I had a weapon of any kind I should not fear."

"Would a revolver do?"

"Yes," replied Bertrand, eagerly. "Have you got one?"

"Yes; I found it arter a fight in the street, it were down in the gutter and I picked it up and hid it. Some soldiers got into a fight one night at the sheebang over the way, and I s'pose one on 'em lost it."

"Will you get it for me?"

"Yes, right away," and noiselessly the boy left the room.

"Fortune at last favors me!" cried Bertrand, in exultation. "With a good revolver in my paw, I'd defy the devil himself to kill me without a struggle or a noise. Besides, I am forewarned, and forewarned is forearmed. Now let this angel-faced devil come—and yet I should hate to kill her." The tones of his voice softened as he spoke. "The memory of the old time comes back to me, but she deserves death, and it is only just that I should be her executioner."

Bertrand's reflections were interrupted by the return of the hunchback.

The boy drew a large revolver from under his ragged jacket and handed it to Bertrand.

The practiced eye of the ex-Confederate soldier quickly saw the excellence of the weapon.

"A 'Remington,'" he said, musingly. "How many times the balls of these playthings in the hands of the 'blue-coats' have whistled about my head down in old Rackensack! I should like to see Arkansas again, but I'm afraid my life

wouldn't be worth much in that region." Then he turned and addressed the boy. "This is just the thing, Rick; I am much obliged to you. Finish the ale," and as he spoke he poured what remained of the liquor into the glass.

"Sit down and drink it up, my lad. I've taken quite a fancy to you. I think that you have quick wits and keen eyes. I want a lad like you. How would you like to leave this den and go with me?"

The boy's eyes sparkled with delight as the welcome words fell upon his ears.

"I'd like to go, but—"

"But what?" said Bertrand kindly.

"I ain't fit to go with a gentleman like you, and I'm a hunchback," the mournful tone of the boy's voice told how keenly he felt his degradation.

"A gentleman!" exclaimed Bertrand, laughing. "I don't look much like a gentleman in these rags," and he glanced down contemptuously at his coarse garments as he spoke.

"Maybe you've got a reason why you wear them," said the boy, shrewdly.

"Yes, I have a reason, Rick, and a very good one, too, but though my fortunes may be desperate now, yet I am sure they will not always continue so. What do you say; will you go with me when I want you?"

"But my hump?" said the boy, doubtfully.

"So long as your tongue is straight, what do I care if your back is crooked!" exclaimed Bertrand. "I want one who will serve me faithfully; one who has the courage to carry out my orders. What say you, will you be that one?"

"Yes," said the boy, promptly.

"It is a bargain, then!" cried Bertrand, grasping the hand of the boy, and for a moment holding it within his own. "And now tell me, Rick, who and what are you? Are your parents living?"

"I never had any that I know on," said the hunchback, sorrowfully.

"An orphan, eh?"

"Yes, sir; I been knocked about ever since I kin remember. I tried to be a boot-black, and for to sell papers, but the other boys made fun of me 'cos I had a crooked back, and wolloped me 'cos I was weak and little. At last I come here with Mister Casper. That was 'bout two years ago."

"And was this girl—this Lurlie—here when you came?" Bertrand asked, carelessly.

"No, sir."

"Ah, how long has she been here?"

"'Bout two months," the boy replied. "Her father—he's the man wot keeps the house—was taken sick, and she come to take care of him."

"Where did she come from? Do you know?" Bertrand asked.

"Yes, from Wilmington; it ain't very far from here."

"I know where it is," Bertrand said. "Do you know what she was doing in Wilmington?"

"Yes, she was keeping school there," the boy answered.

Bertrand's face showed surprise.

"A school-teacher, eh?" he murmured, slowly, to himself; "her spirit must have been tamed down to consent to such toil as that. Can she have changed? Can her Heart of Fire have tamed to one of flesh? Perhaps—but, no, it is impossible! When the tiger changes his stripes then she will change, but not before."

Rick watched the face of Bertrand with great curiosity.

"You and Miss Lurlie used to know each other, didn't you?" questioned the boy, shrewdly.

Bertrand laughed at the question.

"Perhaps," he said.

"Well, good-night, mister; I'll go, 'cos they may think down-stairs there's something up if I stay here so long." As he spoke, the boy moved toward the door.

"Good-night, Rick. Remember that when I want you, you are to come."

"All right, mister." The door closed behind the boy. Bertrand awaited the coming of his secret foe.

CHAPTER X.

THE UNKNOWN POWER.

THE landlord of the Kankakee House looked at his daughter in astonishment when she uttered the strange speech after

Bertrand Tasnor had left the room.

"Why, gal!" he exclaimed in utter amazement, "what do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say!" she replied, excitedly. "I cannot guess what evil destiny has brought this man to our house, but I am sure that his coming here bodes no good to me."

"Why, what harm can he do you?" asked the amazed old man.

"Come up-stairs, father, and I will tell you," the girl replied. "We can not speak here without danger that some one may overhear us."

"But, I can't leave the bar, gal; besides there ain't any danger that any one will hear what we say. We kin speak low," said the landlord.

"Very well," replied the girl, absently. A strange expression was upon her face; it was evident that her thoughts were far away.

"Now how kin this feller hurt you?" demanded the father.

"You know the old captain who comes here?" said the girl.

"What? Captain Middough?"

"Yes."

"Of course I know him; he says that I keep as good liquor as any man in Chicago," said the landlord, with pride.

"Your good liquor is not the attraction that draws him to this house," Lurlie spoke dryly.

"What then?"

"Your daughter."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Blazes!" growled the old man, in astonishment. "You don't say so!"

"It is the truth," replied Lurlie; "he happened to see me the first time he ever entered these doors. He comes now to see me; that is the reason of his visiting here. He told me so on his last visit."

"Another one bewitched, eh?"

"Yes; he is in love with me."

"Much good it will do him!" said the landlord, in a surly way.

"It will do him a great deal of good, for I am going to marry him," replied Lurlie, quietly.

"What?" cried the father, opening his eyes wide in astonishment.

"I repeat, I am going to become his wife," replied the girl.

"You marry old Middough! Why, he's worth a hundred thousand, sure!" said the old man in a tone which plainly indicated that he was thoroughly astonished.

"And yet, with all his money, he wishes to make me his wife. He told me so on his last visit. He says the fact that I am only a poor girl, and far removed from the circle in which he moves, does not matter in the least. He is willing to marry me, even if it displeases all his relatives."

"And what did you say?"

"I requested time to think it over, and promised him that I would give him a decided answer when he returned to Chicago," said Lurlie.

"Well, now, that is a chance for you!" cried the father, in delight. "Old Middough's got plenty of money. I mought have known that if you ever looked at him with those eyes of yours, he was a gone coon. How soon are you going to be married?"

"I can not tell now," said the girl, thoughtfully, and contracting her brows as she spoke.

"Why not?" asked the father. "The sooner the better, I should say."

"And so I should have said, an hour ago," replied the girl, an angry look upon her face as she spoke.

"An hour ago?"

"Yes, before this stranger came."

"What has he got to do with it?" demanded the old man, with ugly decision.

"Every thing!" cried the girl, bitterly. "I can never marry Middough, while this man is living!"

"No?"

"Not without great risk."

"Well, I don't understand," muttered the old man, dubiously.

"And I can not fully explain. There are some dark passages in my life, father, that must be kept secret, even from you."

"And this cuss has got something to do with them events?"

"Yes."

"Why, he's only a poor shoot, anyway. Give him a ten-dollar note to clear out," said the landlord, sagaciously.

"Ten dollars!" cried Lurle, in contempt. "Father, you do not know this man. He could not be turned from his way by ten thousand dollars."

"No!" and the worthy landlord of the Kankakee House again opened his eyes widely in astonishment.

"No," repeated the girl; "his nature is like my own—cold, hard and pitiless; but, he does not give way to passion like I do. His heart is iron, his will an unbending one. I have not forgotten, though it is years since I have looked upon his face. I thought him dead, but I recognized him at once, although he has changed greatly."

"Then he ain't a friend of yours," said the old man, thoughtfully.

"A friend, no!" cried the girl, with bitterness in her tone; "he is my deadly enemy!"

"How kin he prevent you from marrying Middough, if you and he agree for to hitch teams?"

"I can not tell you that; it must remain a secret, but he can prevent my marriage with Middough or with any one else."

"Ain't you dreaming?" asked the old man, incredulously.

"Oh, no!" cried Lurle, bitterly. "I am wide awake, though would to heaven that it were all a dream. I tell you, father, that were I standing by the altar and the minister was reading the service which was to make me a wife, this man, with one single word, could stop all. He could make me leave the altar's side and follow him throughout the world!" Earnestly the words came from her lips.

The old man stared at her for a few moments in silence.

"I s'pose that this chap an' you have had some love affair," he said, at length.

"Yes," said Lurle, slowly.

"Well, it's funny that I don't know any thing 'bout it. I'm sure I never see'd him afore," said the old man, evidently puzzled.

"Oh, yes; he was at Kankakee, and stopped at our house there, years ago," replied the girl.

"What!" and a sudden light appeared to break in upon the old fellow's bewildered brain. "I remember now; you went away from us and were gone 'bout a year, an' you never told any thing 'bout it. Was he mixed up in that?"

"Yes."

"He was your lover then?"

"Yes, and I once loved him, as I had never loved before, and perhaps as I shall never love again," said the girl, a tinge of sadness in her voice as she spoke.

"You don't love him now?"

"Love him? I hate him!" cried the girl, her voice full of fiery passion.

"And does he love you?"

"No; he hates me as bitterly as I do him," she replied. "I thought at first that he had not recognized me, but, his parting speech convinced me that he remembered as I remembered."

"What's to be done?" said the old man, thoughtfully.

"He must not interfere with my plans!" cried Lurle, a wicked light sparkling in her clear blue eyes. "By marrying this old man—whose every sense I have snared to my will—I gain all that I wish for in this world. I am tired of being a drudge. I would be rich. The chains that this old captain offers are golden ones; all that I desire in the world he will give me. I want peace and rest. I would forget the past—forget the life linked in by days and nights of suffering. In the gay world of fashion I can forget. Then the bitter memories will not crowd in like an inky mantle upon my brain. I am young yet; I would enjoy my life; taste the pleasure that the world can give me and which I never yet enjoyed."

"But this man is right in the way," observed the old man, thoughtfully, and an evil expression appeared upon his hard features.

"Father, he must be put out of the way," said the girl, lowly and sternly.

"Well, I thought of that," replied the old man, in the same cautious tones.

"He must die that I may live. It is a struggle for existence between us. I must crush him or he will crush me."

"He's right in the trap, too," said the old man, grimly.

"Yes, such another chance may never occur. He knows me, I am sure of it, for he called me by the old pet name that he used years ago. He attempted to make it appear as if it was but the result of an accident, the using of the expression, but I am not easily deceived."

Stern and haggard was now the beautiful face of the girl, and in the blue eyes, now gleaming so fiercely, was written *murder*!

"How kin it be done without detection, 'cos we've got to dispose of the body?" asked the father.

"I have thought of a way," replied the girl, quickly. "There is a small door that leads from the next apartment into his. By means of that door my minister of death shall strike him."

"And who is he?" asked the old man, in wonder.

"To-morrow that question will be answered," replied the girl, with a smile of deadly meaning. "There will be no danger of detection. His death will seem but the result of his own carelessness. No one on this earth will guess that he perished by the agency of a foe."

"Well, I don't understand," muttered the landlord, utterly bewildered.

"Wait until to-morrow and you will. One glance at his face will tell you the manner of his death, and you can easily guess the agent I employ to strike the blow."

"It will make no noise?"

"No; no shriek of mortal agony shall tell the world that the hour of death is nigh. By midnight he will be before his Judge." And with these mysterious words, she glided from the room.

CHAPTER XI.

A QUESTION AND AN ANSWER.

THE staunch propeller, "State of Michigan," was plowing her way through the moonlit waters of the lake, her prow headed toward Chicago.

It was a beautiful night, clear and cool.

The hands of the clock in the pilot-house had long since passed the figures that denoted eleven, and midnight was near at hand.

Two men were pacing up and down the deck whereon the moonbeams played in rays of silver light.

We will describe them.

One was an old man. His hair and beard were white as snow. Keen were the blue eyes that sparkled above his ruddy cheeks. And though the snow of seventy winters had whitened his locks, yet his step was as light and his form as stalwart as though he were in the bright heyday of manhood rather than a man approaching the confines of the grave with rapid steps. This was Lemuel Middough, captain of the "State of Michigan," and one of the leading ship-owners of Chicago.

Lemuel Middough was a man well to do in the world. His note on "Change" would be readily cashed for almost any amount.

Middough had come to Chicago when the—now justly proud—"Metropolis of the West" was but a swamp through which stole two muddy creeks.

He had seen the city grow up from the wilderness into the great center point of the West.

He had early embarked in the carrying trade on the lakes, and from the owner of a little ugly sloop of fifty tons he had risen to be the proprietor of one of the largest propeller-lines on the lakes.

From the force of habit, Captain Middough still commanded. He declared that he could not sleep well on shore more than a week at a time, unless it was in the winter, when perforce he must remain on shore, the lakes being frozen.

Middough was an impulsive, generous-hearted man. Frank and open in his bearing, and showing in his manner some traces of the early sailor-life that he had led.

He was a self-made man in every sense of the word. Commencing without a dollar, he had made thousands by honest toil.

The other, who with Middough paced the deck of the "State of Michigan," was named Amos Kenwood. He was the second officer of the propeller. In person he was short and thick-set, with a manly, expressive face. In years about thirty-five or forty.

Kenwood had joined the "Michigan" early in the spring, and therefore at the time that we write of, he had been on the vessel some four months.

By nature, Kenwood was silent and reserved. He spoke but little, and did not invite conversation. Those who came in daily contact with him noticed that a cloud seemed ever on his brow. Naturally they guessed that some heavy sorrow had, at some previous time, fallen upon him, and that the remembrance of it had blighted all his life.

Middough himself had taken quite an interest in the silent man, who performed his duties so thoroughly and willingly; but even he had not attempted to unravel the mystery of the gloom that overshadowed the life of the first officer of the "Michigan."

Another strange fact too had been noted by those whose business brought them in contact with Kenwood, and that was, that his neck was encircled by a scarlet ring imprinted on the flesh—a livid mark, as if a hand of fire had grasped the throat and left its blazon there.

Kenwood generally wore a scarf around his neck as if he wished to conceal the strange blemish on his throat.

This scarlet ring, taken in connection with his silence, and the gloom ever upon his brow, gave all that knew him the idea that in his past life were chapters of fearful meaning.

As the two paced slowly along the deck of the propeller, Middough, every now and then cast his eyes forward, looking eagerly to the right of the vessel.

"No signs of the Chicago light yet, Mr. Kenwood," he said, after an earnest gaze southward.

"No, sir," replied the other; "but we cannot be far from it."

"We should see it before midnight."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall be glad to reach Chicago. I have certain reasons for wishing to be in that city as soon as possible." And as the captain spoke, a glad smile came over his bluff features.

Kenwood did not reply, but paced onward by his side in silence.

"Kenwood, were you ever in love?" questioned the captain, suddenly.

The officer started at the question, and a look of pain passed over his features, but Middough, who was watching the surface of the lake beyond, did not notice.

"Yes, sir, I have been in love in days gone by," replied Kenwood, in a voice that trembled slightly as he spoke.

"Kenwood, I'm going to ask your advice on a rather delicate subject," said Middough, after a short pause.

"Very well, sir; I will try and give it to the best of my ability."

"What do you think of an old man marrying a young girl? Of course I don't mean a feeble old man, but one like myself for instance, bluff, hardy and full of life," said the captain, slowly.

"I hardly know how to reply," said the other, after a pause. "If I knew the parties perhaps it would be different."

"Take the general idea of the subject."

"Well, from that standpoint, I must say that I do not think it is a wise proceeding on the part of the husband."

Middough cleared his throat a bit. The answer was very unsatisfactory.

"You do not think, then, that such marriages are advisable?"

"No, I do not," answered Kenwood, honestly.

"Well, why so?"

"Because I can hardly believe it possible that they would be suited to each other; and, of course, unless husband and wife are suited, the marriage can not be a happy one."

"Yes, that's very true," said Middough, slowly; "but if the parties were suited to each other—"

"Why, then of course they would live happily together; but, as a general thing, I think that such marriages would not be productive of happiness."

"Well now, take a case like this," and the captain grew earnest in his tone. "Suppose that an old man, or one that the world calls old, although he himself feels that he has twenty years of life in his veins yet—suppose that such a man, wealthy and holding a good position among his fellow-men, should happen to meet with a beautiful girl—she poor and belonging to the poorer class; supposing that, attracted by her beauty and gentleness, he took an interest in her, and that she, despite the difference in their years, returned that interest; suppose the man, finding that he really did like the girl, proposed to her to make her his wife, without thinking

of the difference in their social positions, and she gratefully accepted that offer, don't you think that she would make a good wife and that the marriage would be a happy one?" And the captain looked earnestly in the face of his companion when he had finished.

"Are you sure that the girl is not dazzled by the position and wealth of her suitor? that she loves the comfort, luxury, that she will receive by the union rather than the man who gives them to her?" said Kenwood, earnestly.

For a moment Middough looked puzzled at the question.

"Well, I don't know. I suppose that it is hard to say," he replied, finally. "But, even in that case," he continued, warming up with the subject—"even allowing that the girl is influenced more by the thoughts of what the union will give her than by her love for the man, then gratitude for the benefits he has conferred upon her should make her love him after marriage, if she did not before." And the captain paused with a look on his face that plainly said that he considered his argument unanswerable.

"Gratitude, captain, is a strange quality," said Kenwood, quietly. "Gratitude sometimes turns into hate apparently without reason, except that the weight of obligation is too heavy to be borne with ease. Many a man and woman in this world has—like the snake—turned upon and stung the hand that has befriended them. Gratitude is an uncertain ally to count upon in this world's battles. There are some in this life so worthless at heart that, the more you do for them the more they think you ought to do—who really hate you because they are indebted to you."

"That's very true," said Middough, thoughtfully.

"I do not say that it is the fact in this case, for I suppose your supposition concerns a living man and woman—"

Middough silently nodded assent.

"Still, it is well to consider all these things. I do not say it is impossible that a young girl should truly love a man much her senior in years, but I do say that it is unlikely."

For a few moments the two paced the deck in silence.

"I'll stake my life that she loves me!" exclaimed Middough, suddenly.

Kenwood was not astonished at the exclamation, for he had guessed that the captain was one of the supposed parties.

"Then you are the man, captain?"

"Yes."

"And the woman?"

"A blue-eyed girl of eighteen that I met just by chance in one of the worst streets in all Chicago."

"And you love her?"

"Yes; she has bewitched me."

"Bewitched you!" Kenwood smiled at the expression.

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MARK ON THE NECK.

For a moment or so the two walked on in silence, then the captain spoke:

"I had occasion one day just about a month ago to enter into a little saloon on Wells street, called the Kankakee House, and there I beheld the prettiest woman that I have ever laid eyes on. She was a little sprite of a girl, about eighteen years old, with short, golden curls, bright blue eyes and the face of an angel—a perfect little witch. I confess that I was fascinated at the first glance, long as I have lived in the world. Of course I found an excuse to go to the saloon again and again. I got acquainted with the girl, and I found that her disposition was as angelic as her face. She is the daughter of the man that keeps the saloon. His name is Casper. The girl is called Lurlie."

"A strange name."

"Yes, but it suits her well. Lurlie—to lure; that is, using the word in its best sense—to attract."

"Yes, but it is generally used attached to peril; to lure, to attract to danger," said Kenwood, dryly.

"Well, there is danger in her—danger to any man's heart that looks upon her," said the captain, gayly. "But, to be brief: I took a strange interest in the girl, and she seemed gratified at my notice. She apparently put herself out to please me. I noticed this, mind you, without letting her see that I was watching her. There was such a charm about her, so much gentleness and innocence, that, even if I had

not wished to love her I should have been compelled to do so despite myself. On my last visit there I asked her how she would like to become an old man's darling? If she thought that she could be happy as my wife? Ah, Kenwood, it would have done your heart good to have seen that girl's features when the offer fell upon her ears. For a moment she looked me full in the face with those soft blue eyes of hers opened to their widest extent, as if she was unable to comprehend my meaning. Then, when it was plain to her the moment afterward, the tears stole into her eyes, and she hid her face on my breast, and said that she did love me. Kenwood, I felt ten years younger that moment. 'Tisn't every man of my age that can win the love of a pure young girl's heart."

"And you are going to marry her then?" asked Kenwood, who had a dim suspicion that perhaps the old captain was not quite as sharp-sighted as he imagined himself to be.

"Well, it is not exactly settled yet," replied the captain, with some slight hesitation. "She confessed freely that she loved me, but asked me to wait until my return from this trip before she gave a decided answer. But, there's no doubt about it whatever. I read in the girl's eyes that she loved me and meant to consent. It was only maiden coyness that impelled her to ask for the delay. I am sure that when I visit her to-morrow, and ask her to name the day for our marriage, she will do so at once. I shall be the happiest old fellow in Chicago." And the captain rubbed his hands together gleefully, as he spoke.

Kenwood watched him with a peculiar look in his eyes. It was evident that he was no believer in the power of love.

"Well, captain, I wish you joy," he said.

"I'll try and deserve it," replied Middough, cheerfully.

"I have opened my heart to you to-night, because I knew you to be a sensible man and that you could give me good counsel."

Kenwood could not forbear smiling at the idea of counseling a man who had so fully made up his mind as to what he should do.

"Of course I haven't said a word about this affair to any of my relations," said Middough. "A precious row they'd kick up if they had any idea that I was going to put my neck into the matrimonial halter at my time of life, as they would say. Just as if a man was ever too old to do a wise thing!"

"You are the best judge, probably," said Kenwood, quietly. He thought that advice would be thrown away upon a man so determined upon his course of action as Middough.

"Well, I should say so!" cried Middough, heartily, "but you see my relatives would never admit it. They would call me an old fool for even dreaming that a young girl could love me."

"Yes; that is probable."

"Now, there's my nephew, Wirt—he's a sensible young dog, for such a devil-may-care fellow as he is. I sounded Wirt carefully upon the subject before I went away on this trip, and he fully agreed with me, that it was possible for a young girl to love an old man, and that I had a perfect right to do as I pleased in all things regarding myself. Of course I didn't let the young rascal see what I was driving at."

"Then you intend to be married soon?"

"Yes; just as soon as I get Lurlie to consent. I haven't got so much time in the world that I can afford to waste any of it," replied the captain.

"That is true."

"By the way, Kenwood," said Middough, suddenly, "there is something about you that puzzles me."

"Indeed! what is it?"

"The abstraction that you seem to be perpetually in—the cloud on your face. It doesn't suit with you at all. You must have suffered terribly at some time in your past life to have the effects still so visible upon you."

"You are right; I have suffered terribly," replied Kenwood, in a tone that told plainly that even the thought of that suffering was bitter.

"I hope I am not intruding upon your confidence," said Middough, kindly.

"Oh, no; not at all. It is but natural that you should wonder at my gloomy abstraction. I'll tell you the cause of it. You have made me your confidant; I'll return the compliment; perhaps it will make me feel better to speak of the past."

"Has that peculiar scarlet mark around our neck any thing to do with your story?"

"Yes; that is a symbol to keep alive the memory of the wrong that has been done me, and keep me from forget-

ting that, some day, I may have bloody vengeance for that wrong," replied Kenwood, in a voice that showed how the memory of the past rankled in his breast.

"To begin at the beginning; I am a native of an Eastern State, by profession a sailor, and have followed the sea from early boyhood. At the commencement of our late war I enlisted on the Northern side. My regiment was ordered to the West. I served my term out, then re-enlisted. I rose gradually, so that, when my regiment was ordered to join Steele in his Arkansas expedition, which resulted in the capture of Little Rock, I held a commission as first lieutenant."

"After the capture of the Rock, my regiment was sent to Pine Bluff. We were in garrison there for some time. Then we went on the Camden expedition, and then, when we returned, went again to the Bluff."

"One day, on a scouting expedition, I halted for water at a little house some twenty miles from the Bluff on the river road. There I became acquainted with a young and pretty girl. I took quite a fancy to her, and she to me. With the exception of an aged father, she was alone in the house. Her two brothers were in the ranks of the First Arkansas Regiment, fighting for the Union. Like her brothers, the girl was loyal to the old flag."

"Of course, I managed in my scouting expeditions to pay quite a number of visits to this young lady."

"One day, on dismounting at the house, I found her in tears. After much solicitation, she told me what the matter was. A noted guerrilla leader, fighting on the Confederate side, had, like me, stopped at the house, and, like me again, had fallen in love with the girl. She, however, had repulsed his suit. This man had heard of my visits to the lady, and had openly threatened to her that he would lay in wait for me some fine day and provide me with a hempen collar. I laughed at the threat, of course. I had little fear, but the girl was terrified at the thought of my being exposed to danger, and implored me to be careful, which I promised, readily. I had counted without my host, though; for, one day, when at the farm-house with my men, the guerrillas came down upon us like an avalanche. Half my squad were killed outright; the rest fled, and I was taken prisoner. As the guerrilla promised, I was provided with a hempen collar, and swung up to a tall cottonwood tree, right before the eyes of the girl. She fainted with fright, and was carried off by this demon. She was never heard of after. The rest of my regiment arrived just in time to cut me down and save my life, but I lay on my back for many an hour, just between life and death. The mark of the rope is still on my neck, you see. I shall wear it to my dying day."

"A terrible story."

"Yes; do you wonder that I am abstracted and silent when I have this horrible memory ever with me? Sleeping or waking, I pray but for one thing."

"And that is?"

"That I may one day meet this fiend who committed the horrible outrage, and have a chance to put my mark on him as he has his on me." Intense with feeling was the tone that he spoke in.

"It is possible that you may meet him."

"Yes; and when that hour comes, either he or I will stand before the Great Judge a few minutes after."

"Hulloa! there's the Chicago lights!"

And so the conversation ended.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TREAD OF THE CAT.

LURLIE met Rick on the stairs.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To get some beer for the gentleman," he answered.

"Did you put him in the room where I told you?"

"Yes, ma'am," he replied.

"Did he say that he was going to bed at once?"

"He didn't say nothing at all 'bout it," Rick answered.

"He only wanted to know if I could get him some beer, that's all."

"Very well, get it, then," and Lurlie, reaching the landing, went into the room and closed the door.

"I wonder what she is so mighty curious 'bout this feller for?" and Rick ran his hands through his shock of red hair reflectively. "I never see'd her so before. 'Pears to me that something's up. I must find out what it is. And with

his reflection, Rick descended to the bar, got his pitcher of ale, and again ascended to the room of the stranger.

Lurlie, after entering her room, paced the floor for a few moments, evidently in great agitation.

"Now let me think!" she cried, sinking with an air of weariness into a chair. "That he has recognized me, I am sure. I detected it in the glitter of those cruel black eyes. How I loved those eyes once, and that man! How I hate him now! I am sure that he will try to harm me. I know that he hates me fully as much as I hate him. He is poor, too; that is evident by his shabby dress. His old ill luck still clings to him, then. What evil genius sent him here just at this moment? Just as I had fancied that, hereafter, this world's life would be easy for me, and that, though the past was all gloom and shame, the future might be bright with peace and happiness?"

Then she rose from her seat, and for a few moments paced the floor with the stealthy and nervous tread of the caged tiger.

"Heaven knows I do not want to kill him but I must; it is forced upon me! I have but one choice—one road to follow and that leads to death. If he learns that I have fascinated this old captain, he will denounce me to him. Then my vision of happiness, of wealth, will be destroyed, and by his hand, too. Has he not wronged me enough already? Why should he live to make my life one of torture? He is in my power. Fate has given him into my hands. Besides I will not shed his blood, although I take his life. A single twist of the fingers and the deed is done. No telltale blood; no marks of violence will betray the manner of his death. All will think that it is the result of accident. Oh! I do not want to do it!" and for a moment she wrung her hands in agony. "But, it must be. His hateful presence shall not keep me from treading the path to wealth that a kind fortune has placed before my feet. I will be this man's wife if I have to destroy not one Bertrand Tasnor, but ten! Oh! how well I remember his name, and how I used to watch for his step, and count the hours that intervened between our stolen meetings! But now, in the place of love, is hate—bitter, unrelenting hate! Oh! let me rest awhile. My brain seems to be on fire." With a convulsive sob Lurlie, the strange compound of a woman and a tiger, threw herself upon the bed, and buried her face in the pillow.

For half an hour or so she remained there, sobbing convulsively but lowly.

Strange words came in between the convulsive sobs. She murmured of a babe and blamed herself for that babe's death.

Many a dark secret was in that lifted head that the bright, crispy curls crowned with rays of glittering gold!

After a time the sobs grew fainter and less frequent. She rose from the bed and bathed her temples.

"He must have gone to bed by this time," she murmured. Then she went to the door and listened. All was still in the house.

"I can easily find the little door," she said, "and then, that once opened, death will come to him, not suddenly but sure, a death that he can not fight against, for I will steal upon his senses and numb them to forgetfulness."

Then again she opened the door and listened. As before, all was still.

"I am sure that I can find the door, easy in the dark," she said. "If I take a light when I open the door the rays may penetrate into the room and might alarm him should he chance to awake; but, that is unlikely. Why should he lay awake. He can not expect danger. I did not let him see that I recognized him."

Then to her ears came the sound of footsteps descending the stairs, and in a few moments Rick appeared bearing in his hand the light that he had taken from the room occupied by the stranger.

"What have you got there, Rick?" asked Lurlie, appearing at her door suddenly as the boy passed. Rick started as if he had been shot, and the lamp almost dropped from his hand.

"Why, Miss Lurlie," he said, after drawing a long breath, "how you frightened me."

"Where did you get that lamp from?" she demanded.

"From the room where the gentleman is," replied the hunchback.

"Ah! he has gone to bed, then?" exclaimed Lurlie, hoping that it was so.

"Yes, Miss," said Rick, who did not dare tell her that

he had told the stranger about the gas. He saw that she was anxious about the unknown, and had taken his appearance with the lamp as a sign that the stranger had retired to rest.

"You need not sit up any longer, Rick; you can go to bed."

"Yes, miss," said the boy, slowly proceeding down-stairs to his bed, which was only a heap of rags in a little dark recess formed by the stairway. "Wouldn't she cut up rough, if she knowed that I'd told that feller up-stairs all 'bout the room! She's up to something, to-night; I kin tell that by her eyes. They look jist like the eyes of a cat. I reckon she won't make much out of that gent up-stairs, though. He's jist as cool as an iceberg. Why, a perarie wind in winter's a fool to him! If I go with him it will be jist high times with me!" And, with this pleasant reflection, Rick crawled into his little den, put out the light, gathered the rags around him and was soon in that paradise—which is free alike to all in this world, be they prince or peasant—the land of dreams.

Lurlie watched Rick until the glimmer of his light was lost in the turn of the stairway.

"Shall I go now or wait for a few minutes?" she asked herself. For a moment she pondered. "I had better wait," she said, at length. "He must be asleep, or my plan will fail; yet, even if it does, he will not be apt to suspect that it is a blow aimed at his life."

Lurlie returned to her room, and for a quarter of an hour or more remained quietly seated, buried in gloomy thoughts.

Suddenly she rose to her feet. "It is time," she murmured; "he must be asleep by this."

Quietly and carefully she stole up-stairs. Hardly a board creaked under her light tread.

She reached the landing whereon was situated the room that had been assigned to the stranger.

Cautiously she opened the door of the room next to that one, and entered.

To return to Bertrand: After the departure of the hunchback, he turned the gas-light down so that it burned with a faint blue flame and threw no light whatever out into the room. Then, with the revolver by his side, he extended himself upon the bed, ready for the approach of the foe that he felt sure would attack him at some time during the night.

The gas was within easy reach. In a second he could turn it up to its full height.

Bertrand waited patiently. Time passed, and yet no sign of the anticipated foe.

Then, suddenly, a slight noise fell upon the listener's ear. With every sense aroused to acuteness, he waited.

The noise came from the direction of the little secret door in the wall. It was plain that some one was opening it.

"I wonder if it is she?" he muttered, as he raised the revolver—he had previously cocked it—and trained it in the direction of the little door. "Is it fated that she shall perish by my hand?"

CHAPTER XIV.

LURLIE'S WEAPON.

In the darkness Bertrand waited. Eagerly he listened for the noise which would tell him that the secret foe, who thus stealthily, and in the gloom of night, sought to work him harm, had gained entrance to the room.

The seconds lengthened into minutes, yet the keen ear of the threatened man could not hear a sound that would denote the approach of the midnight visitor.

The revolver, firmly grasped in the iron hand of the man, was leveled directly at the little door. A single pressure of the forefinger and the missile of death would crash through the brain of any one attempting to enter by that passage.

The minutes went slowly on. Still, in the gloom and silence, Bertrand waited. The slight noise at the little door was not repeated. No sound broke the silence of the night.

"What does it mean?" muttered the watcher to himself, in doubt. "Can it be possible that my assailant has guess-

ed that I am ready for the attack? No, that is impossible," he said, after a moment's thought. "Why, then, if she thinks me sleeping, does she not proceed to execute her purpose? I can not guess this riddle. I am sure that I heard some one at that little door, sure that some one opened it, and yet the person, whoever it was, has not attempted to enter."

Again Bertrand listened attentively.

"Not even a mouse is stirring," he muttered. "Has the attempt been given up, or have my ears deceived me? Bah! I am getting weary."

But, if Bertrand's ears failed to detect the approach of a stranger, his sense of smell did not. He suddenly became conscious that his room was being rapidly filled with the noxious fumes of gas.

The odor was getting stronger and stronger each instant.

"What the devil can it mean?" quoth the ex-road-agent, in disgust. "How the deuce has all this gas got into my room? It's escaping somewhere, and badly too. It can't be from my burner."

Bertrand turned up the gas a little, and it threw a dim light over the little room.

"Bah! I shall stifle here, presently!" he exclaimed, sitting up on the side of the bed. "Where can it come from, and why the devil didn't I smell it before?"

Bertrand's eyes then wandered toward the little door. It was open! His ears then had not deceived him; some one had been at the door.

"By Jove!" he cried, "I was right then after all. But, I must get out of this, or this cursed gas will strangle me."

Then he turned the light up full, rose to his feet, and approached the door. The fumes of the gas grew still more offensive.

Suddenly a thought flashed through the man's brain. His brow grew dark and his eyes flashed fire as the horrible suspicion came to him.

"Can it be possible that this is the game?" he muttered, between his clenched teeth. "It is like her devilish cunning. If I had been asleep, too, it would have succeeded. I should have been put out of the way as easily as we drown blind kittens. No telltale mark of violence upon my body; an accident, that's all. Let me see if my suspicion is correct."

Bertrand lit a match; then stooping, passed through the little open door into the adjoining room. As he had expected, the room was filled with the fumes of the gas.

By the flickering light of the burning match he examined the gas-burner. His suspicions were correct; the gas was turned on full.

"I was right!" he cried; "the gas was to be the weapon to deal me my death. What devilish cunning! She believed me to be asleep; opened the little door, then turned on the gas, expecting that the fumes of it would strangle me. And then in the morning, when they found me, swollen up and disfigured by the deadly vapor, all would believe that I was a green countryman, who had blown out my gas instead of turning it off. It was well planned; but the blow has failed."

A single movement of the hand and the gas was turned off; then Bertrand returned to his own room.

"Now, then, shall I lie down and sleep or remain awake on the watch? Am I safe till morning or not?" Thoughtfully he pulled the ends of his mustache as he pondered the question.

"By Jove! I have it!" he cried, suddenly, after thinking the matter over for a moment. "Yonder room may be safer than this one. That door can be bolted on the other side. I'll change my quarters; then, I think, I will rest quiet until morning."

Bertrand passed through the little door into the other room again; lit the gas, and bolted the door behind him. He examined the room carefully, and being fully convinced that no one could gain entrance to the apartment without waking him, he turned down the gas, threw himself on the bed, and within five minutes was fast asleep.

A watcher who could have stood by the bedside of the sleeper would never have guessed how desperate were the fortunes, or how stained with crime was the career of the man that slept so calmly. His breathing was almost as regular as that of an infant, and the quiet smile upon the bronzed features told no tell-tale story of the reckless life that he had led or of the many evil deeds that he had done.

The regular respirations of Bertrand Tasnor told plainly

of dreamless slumber. How different was the sleep of Lur-
lie Casper!

Her golden curls were half hidden by the embrace of the white pillow whereon nestled her dainty little head. The snowy night-dress half open at the throat, revealed the pearly tint of the skin and the exquisite contour of her form.

The full, red lips were moving convulsively, and the beautiful face was distorted, for the dreams of Lur-
lie Casper were fearful. She stood by the bedside of a dying man; his features were swollen and distorted almost beyond recognition. The lips were pinched and blue. The man had died, suffocated by the fumes of gas; a terrible death! And, as she looked upon the features, how horrible to gaze upon, thoughts of the old time came back to her. She remembered when she had pressed the blue-tinted lips—then full of rich, red-blood—with the passionate love-kiss. She remembered when the strong arms—now lying motionless—had folded her to a manly breast and how the pressure had thrilled her to the heart with exquisite joy.

Then, in her sleep, he moaned; cold drops of perspiration stood like beads upon her forehead.

"Bertrand!" she muttered, "Bertrand, forgive me!"

She was dreaming of the time when she had loved Bertrand Tasnor with all the passion of her heart of fire.

How changed was she now! She hated him as though he was a deadly serpent coiled in her path.

The morning came.

Lur-
lie rose early and woke Rick from his rest under the front-stairs.

"You had better call the stranger, Rick," she said; "he may wish to go away early."

The boy shrewdly wondered at her anxiety in regard to the man whom he looked upon as his future master, but, without a word, he departed on his errand.

Lur-
lie waited for his return with impatience.

Each moment she expected to hear the cry of alarm from the boy's throat that would announce the success of her plan.

She waited for that cry, but waited in vain.

In a few minutes—minutes that seemed like hours to Lur-
lie—Rick came slowly down the stairs.

No traces of emotion could be seen in the face of the hunchback; evidently nothing had occurred to alarm him.

"Did you wake him?" Lur-
lie said, with bated breath.

"Yes ma'am," the boy replied.

"You did!" Lur-
lie cried, in astonishment.

"Yes, ma'am," repeated the boy.

"You called him and he answered you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

For a moment Lur-
lie stood like one struck by some sudden bolt.

"He answered you," she said, slowly and with a vacant look upon her face.

"What can it mean?" she murmured. "Can he have escaped?"

The heavy footfall of Bertrand resounded upon the stairs, in answer to the question.

Each step struck a chill to Lur-
lie's heart. She could not understand the escape of her foe from the deadly trap that she had laid so carefully for him.

"Good-morning," said Bertrand, cheerfully, halting as he spoke by the side of Lur-
lie.

A sudden faintness seized upon the girl as she looked upon the bronze face of the man, whose fierce black eyes watched her so keenly.

Vainly she attempted to speak—the words seemed to choke in her throat. Mechanically she clung to the stair-railings; without their aid she would have fallen to the floor.

A peculiar smile came over Bertrand's face as he looked upon the pallid features before him.

"What is the matter this morning? You don't look well," Bertrand said, still watching her keenly.

"I—I—am not well," Lur-
lie stammered, finding the use of her tongue at last.

"Did you rest well, last night?" he asked, carelessly.

"Ye—yes," the girl replied, hesitating in the simple monosyllable.

"So did I, though the gas in my room—or in the next room to mine, rather—leaked dreadfully. I happened to discover it in time and turned it off or it might have strangled me during the night," Bertrand said, carelessly.

Lurlie saw that, by a miracle as it were, her plan had failed.

"I am sorry that you were disturbed," she murmured, slowly.

"Oh, it's nothing!" he cried with a light laugh. "Well, good-by; I shall come and see you at some future time, and you mustn't put me in such a room again unless you desire my death to lie at your door."

A courtly bow and Bertrand was gone.

"Follow him, Rick! See where he goes!" cried Lurlie, hoarsely, her eyes gleaming lurid light.

CHAPTER XV.

KELFORD'S WOOING.

EDMUND KELFORD had not been slow to take advantage of the lucky chance that had procured him the pleasure of an acquaintance with Pearl Cudlipp. He had contrived to enter the little store wherein she tended on two evenings, just as she was preparing to depart for her home. And by telling an innocent little fable as to his residence being in the same direction as hers, he had had the pleasure of escorting her home.

Two long walks had he taken, arm in arm with the girl whom he loved so dearly, and yet he was obliged to confess to himself that he had made but little progress in ascertaining whether he could win the love of Pearl Cudlipp or no.

There was an easy and quiet dignity about her that seemed to keep him at a distance. He was at a loss to guess whether his attentions were pleasing to the girl or distasteful to her, that is, if he was to judge of that fact by her words or actions. Yet there was a certain look in her eyes, a glad expression visible there when he came into her presence that gave him hope.

On the third evening he entered the little store just as the clock was striking nine, but to his astonishment he found that Pearl was absent.

"She's just gone 'ome," said Mrs. Jones, the dressmaker, who was a lady of English extraction, with a strong aversion to using the letter H in its proper place.

"Gone!" exclaimed Kelford, in astonishment.

"This very minit, but p'haps you can catch hup with 'er aif you run 'ard, young man," said Mrs. Jones, with dignity.

"Thank you, I'll try," and Kelford made a hasty exit from the store.

"Well, of all the cursed pieces of ill-luck!" cried Kelford, as he walked rapidly down Madison street toward the bridge. "I should have thought that she might have expected me and waited a little. Can it be that she is trying to avoid me?" Bitter was the thought, yet he did not pause in his chase of the girl. "It looks as if she did not wish my company, yet here, like a fool, I am running after one who possibly does not care in the least for me."

Kelford hurried onward.

Half a block before him he saw the slender graceful form of her he was in search of. He was rapidly overtaking her.

As he approached, the noise of his footsteps fell upon her ear. She turned her head slightly and saw who it was that was so close upon her heels.

If her wish had been to avoid the company of the young man, she gave no sign of it now, for she did not seem to be in the least annoyed when Kelford overtook her.

"You did not wait for me this evening, Miss Pearl," Kelford said.

"How could I know that you were coming for me?" she asked.

"You may be sure that I shall never fail to be in readiness to escort you home, until I discover that my company is disagreeable to you," Kelford replied, warmly.

Pearl colored slightly at his words, and for a moment made no reply. A few steps they walked in silence, then Pearl spoke:

"Mr. Kelford, I will be honest with you," she said, in the low, sweet tones that were so dear to the ears of her lover.

"Your company is far from being disagreeable to me, and yet, perhaps there are some reasons that should make me avoid it—avoid you."

"Avoid me? Oh, Pearl!" Sad was the voice of the young man and troubled was his brow.

"Yes, avoid you," she replied, firmly.

"And why?"

"Do you wish me to tell you, frankly?" she asked, looking full into Kelford's face with the large gray eyes that had set his heart in a flame and given his whole nature to passion's fires.

"Yes, above all things," Kelford said, eagerly.

"Since you wish it, I will do so." There was a tinge of sadness in her voice as she spoke. "In the first place, you are aware of the difference in our positions?"

"I do not exactly understand what you mean," Kelford said.

"Why, I am poor and you are rich."

"You know, then—"

"That you are the rich Mr. Kelford? yes. When you came to the shop where I work and seemed to pay me some little attentions, there were plenty to warn me of the danger that I was in."

"Danger from me!" cried Kelford, indignantly, the hot blood mounting to his face as he spoke.

"Yes; are you not a wealthy man and am not I a poor girl?"

"Does that prevent me from loving you—prevent me from thinking that, some day, I may win you for my wife?" demanded Kelford; and as he spoke the hot blush swept up into the white cheeks of the girl. She cast her eyes to the ground, sorely puzzled, for she had not expected this open avowal of love.

"Perhaps I ought not to speak so abruptly," continued the young man, "but, the words have now passed my lips and can not be recalled. Besides, it is better that you should know the truth. I have loved you, Pearl, from the very moment that my eyes first fell upon your face. I thought it an infatuation, and strove to forget you, but the effort was fruitless; I could not. For the first time in my life I discovered what it was to love a woman with all my heart. I want you for my wife, Pearl; and I mean to win you if I can."

For a few moments the two walked on in silence, Kelford watching the pale face of the fair young girl with an anxious eye.

"I have been told that you are very wealthy," she said, at length.

"Yes, I am," he responded.

"You know that I am a poor girl, depending upon my daily toil for my bread?"

"Yes, I know it," he said, in a tone perfectly calm.

"And does not that make a difference with you?"

"Why should it?"

"Rich men do not marry poor girls very often, in real life, although it may be a common thing in novels."

"Yet I offer to marry you," Kelford's reply was unanswerable.

"But are you sure that you really love me?" she said.

"Yes."

"But, you may grow tired of me after a little while?"

"Never!" replied Kelford, decidedly.

"Ah! don't be too sure of that," the girl said, mournfully;

"it is human nature to change."

"That is true, yet I shall never change in my love for you. A year hence I shall be the same as to-day—no, I am wrong, not exactly the same, for, if I win you, a year after our marriage I shall love you better than on the day when we stand before the altar together."

There was no doubt in the tone of the young man's voice. He evidently believed what he said.

"Do you remember what I told you on the evening when we first became acquainted?" she said.

"In reference to what?"

"To myself."

"I do not remember exactly; what was it?"

"Of my condition in life—of my being an orphan without knowledge of who were my parents."

"Yes, I remember something about it, though I must own not very distinctly. You must remember that it was the first time that I ever had a chance for a free and open conversation with you, and the pleasure I felt was too great to allow me to pay any very great attention to what was said on that occasion. I was very happy, and that was about all that I do remember," said Kelford, honestly.

Pearl laughed a little at the frank confession.

"Well, I will repeat it now, then. I am an orphan, and have never known who and what my parents were. I have been brought up by charity. Are you willing to take me as

your wife the girl who has not—to her knowledge—a single relation in all the world?"

"Yes," Kelford answered, promptly.

"But consider," Pearl interposed, though a soft, glad light shone in the full gray eyes; "some day I may discover my parents. Suppose you make me your wife and then that discovery is made: suppose that I am the child of evil—that my father and mother are wretched and degraded things? Would not that knowledge extinguish, in your heart, all the love for me?"

"Why do you suppose such improbable things?" Kelford asked. "But, I will answer the question. I love you for yourself; love you because I believe that you will make me a good wife, and that, if you do marry me, you will try to make my life happy."

"If I do marry you, you may be sure that I will try," exclaimed Pearl, earnestly.

"I think so; and that, perhaps, is one reason why I love you so dearly, for love you I do. Can you think for one moment the discovery that your parents are not what they should be, can divert the current of my love from you? I do not marry your family—if you have any—but you. Have you not faith that I will love you, come what may?"

"Yes," said Pearl, lowly.

"Then, will you not give me your promise that, some day, you will become my wife?"

"I can not."

"Why?"

"Because I do not love you."

"Not love me!" Kelford's voice was sad.

"No, but I would give my little finger to love you!" cried Pearl, earnestly. "I like you, like you so much; but, I feel that I do not love you yet, and, until I do love you, it would be wrong for me to deceive you; that I never do."

"But, in time you may love me!"

"Perhaps so," Pearl answered, shyly.

They were now before the door of Pearl's boarding-house. With a sudden impulse, Kelford took Pearl in his arms, pressed a kiss upon her not-unwilling lips, and so they parted.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE OLD MAN'S DARLING.

Anxiously Lurrie waited for the return of Rick. Hours passed on but still the boy came not.

Lurrie ate but little at the morning meal. The food seemed to choke her. A dread sense of danger was hanging over her. The future was shadowed by a dark cloud; she could not guess how soon that cloud would open and the lightning-bolt of Bertrand Tasnor's vengeance fall upon her head.

"Why should he return, after so many years' absence—return to cross my path and baffle all my plans?" she murmured. She was seated by the window in her room. From this window she commanded a view of the street.

"Shall I risk it?" she questioned. "I must—I will! If the old captain will marry me, I will dare the consequences! Dare the vengeance of this man into whose hand my marriage will put a weapon with which he can strike me! But, I will dare all. The golden dream shall become a reality; wealth, station, all shall be mine!"

Then, as with unyielding lips she muttered the firm determination to herself, her eyes wandering listlessly out of the window caught sight of a man coming down the street. Her face lighted up as the well-known figure came in view.

"'Tis he!" she cried, in joy, "my future husband; the man who will give me gold in exchange for myself." And she laughed bitterly at the thought.

"Once I gave myself away for love; I am wiser now and he that buys my love must pay gold for it; pay richly too."

Then the old gentleman, whose approach she had watched from the window, coming opposite to the house, saw her head at the casement. He raised his hat, and crossed the street.

"He is coming!" Lurrie exclaimed. "I promised him that he should have his answer to-day; that I would decide whether I would become his wife or refuse the honor—for it is an honor for a man like him, rich and prosperous, to

marry a poor girl like myself. But I talk like a fool," she cried, suddenly. "He gives me wealth it is true, but I give him youth and beauty for I am pretty; my glass has told me it many a time. The exchange, then, is not an uneven one. He is not the first man who has bought love for gold. No, not love, for how can a girl with all the fiery passions of youth burning in her veins love a man old enough to be her father?"

A trite question, and one which has never yet been answered.

Captain Middough—for the old man whose coming Lurrie had watched from the window was the captain of the *Michigan*—entered the house; shook hands with the landlord; and then proceeded up-stairs to Lurrie's apartment. His knock at the door was answered by the voice of Lurrie bidding him enter.

Lurrie rose from her seat by the window; a smile of joy danced in her blue eyes and illuminated her fresh young face as the captain entered.

"Oh! I am so glad that you have come!" she cried, advancing to meet him with outstretched arms.

"Glad to see me, eh?" exclaimed Middough, taking the little hands in his, while his face plainly showed the joy that was in his heart.

"Yes," Lurrie answered, looking up into his face trustingly.

"Glad to see the old man, eh?"

"Why, you are not old—you do not seem to be—at least not to me," Lurrie said.

"When I am with you I feel twenty years younger. Oh! you are a darling little girl!"

Then he drew her to him, imprisoned the little form in his arms, and kissed the red, pouting lips, so full of the dewy freshness of youth. The lips were confidently held up to receive his caress, while the girl shyly nestled her head on his broad breast. He stroked the golden-haired head, and twined his fingers caressingly in the sunny, silken curls.

Middough, though a man stricken with the weight of years, loved the golden-haired siren that he held in his arms with all the fire of youth.

"Do you think so?" she said, shyly, and not raising her head to meet his gaze.

"Yes, of course I do; and I prove that I think so by my actions. Don't you think that I love you?"

"Yes;" soft and lowly came the little word from her lips.

"Lurrie, you promised to give me an answer to a certain question when I returned to Chicago. Are you now ready to give me that answer?" Earnestly the old captain asked the question.

"What was it that you wanted to know?" Lurrie said, with beautifully simulated innocence.

"Have you forgotten?" said the old man, a tinge of reproach in his tone.

"No," Lurrie replied, lifting her blue eyes for a moment to meet his gaze, then hiding them again on his breast.

"You cunning little puss!" exclaimed Middough, patting her head fondly; "do you want me to repeat what I said when you promised to give me an answer on my next visit?"

"Yes," murmured the girl.

"Very well, I will, then, if it will please you; for, to please you, I would do almost any thing." Middough's tone would have convinced any one that he spoke the truth. "I love you, Lurrie, and want you to be my wife. I know that there is a great difference in our ages; that, possibly, the world might say I was too old for you; but, as I have said, your love will make me young again. Will you be an old man's darling? I will do all that I can in the world for you. I am wealthy, but I shall hold my gold as water to gratify your desires. Every thing that I can give you, I will. Lurrie, will you answer me now?"

"But I am a poor girl," she murmured.

"I know that; but what difference do you suppose it makes to me? Lurrie, you have acted as if you loved me. Have I been deceived?"

"No," she said, timidly.

"You do love me?"

"Yes."

"And you will be my wife?"

"But what will your rich relations say?" she asked.

"Will they not look upon me with scorn? I am not strong, and I know that I can not bear to have any one angry with me."

"My relatives know me pretty well; they know that I have a will of my own. Once you are my wife, let any one of

them dare to treat you with disrespect, and he or she, whichever it may be, will never darken my doors again."

"But I am afraid that they will say that I married you for your money; they will never guess the love for you that is in my heart." And as she spoke, she looked the old man full in the face.

He was intoxicated with delight. For an old man like himself to win the love of such a delicate and beautiful girl as he held within his arms—a willing prisoner—was to his mind wonderful. It flattered his pride, generally the weak spot in all men's hearts.

"Let them say what they like in private!" he exclaimed; "they will never speak so to you. The world will talk, my dear; it is useless to try to prevent it. If a man were to stop to kick every envious puppy that snarled at his heels, he would have his hands full. My friends will like my wife; all that do not are no longer friends of mine. I shall make a very queen of you—a little one, but still a queen. As I have said, you shall be an old man's darling."

"Oh, I am sure that you love me! yes, that you love me as well as I love you," she ejaculated, softly.

"And you will consent?"

Lurlie hid her face on the old man's breast, and for a moment did not reply. Busy thoughts ran rapidly through the brain of the little head that the golden curls crowned with a halo of light.

"Shall I dare it?" she murmured to herself, the words not reaching the ears of the man on whose breast her head reposed. "Dare it, and with Bertrand Tasnor living? Why not? He will come here for me if he again seeks me, and I am sure that he will. I shall be far away. He will not dream of seeking Lurlie Casper in the wife of Captain Middough. The chances are against detection. When I leave this house, I will leave no clue behind by which he can follow me. Yes, I have decided. I will do it."

"Must I answer now?" she said, aloud.

"Yes; I am burning up with impatience!" he exclaimed.

"Come, is it yes or no?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Heaven bless you, darling!" he said, impulsively, "and may that Heaven give me many years to watch over you!"

Ah! had Captain Middough known the past life of the woman upon whose head he called down heaven's blessing, he would have shrunk from her side as though she were a poisonous thing, and the words would have withered his lips. But the old sailor was no prophet. He loved the girl with all the love in his nature. To him she was the purest and best of woman kind, and he would have branded as a liar any man who dared to say that she was aught else.

"Then you will be my wife?"

"Yes," she replied, softly, but firmly.

"When?"

"Whenever you like."

"If I had my way, I should say at once!" cried the old sailor, in joy.

"At once?" and Lurlie looked into the face of the old man with a beaming smile.

"But I suppose you will require some little time to prepare for the ceremony?"

"No, I shall be ready whenever you wish. Of course, we will be married privately?"

"Certainly. I don't want a pack of fools grinning at me at my wedding. We can go to the house of the minister and be married there. I will get the license at once. Will to-night suit you?" he asked.

"Yes, if it suits you," she replied.

"It does. I'll come for you in a hack at eight. Be all ready. I'll take you away from this poor home, and in an hour afterward you will be my wife and a little queen in your own house, on Michigan avenue."

"You are so good to me!" she murmured, holding up her lips for a farewell kiss.

Again and again the old man pressed the soft, red lips, and then, with a hearty good-by, left her.

"I have succeeded!" she cried, in triumph, her blue eyes darting fire. "Once his wife, Bertrand Tasnor, I defy you to work me harm!"

CHAPTER XVII.

LURLIE IS PERPLEXED.

THE future looked all bright to Lurlie Casper. She had won the old sailor. Wealth, social position, all would be hers. Yet, in the brightness of the future, that opened so glorious before her, was one little cloud, and in the center of that cloud was the handsome face of Bertrand Tasnor.

"Oh! if he were only dead!" she cried, while her brows knitted and her eyes flashed fire. "How did he escape from me last night? Can it be that there is a special providence watching over the life of such a cold-blooded villain as he is? No, it can not be. Why then was his life preserved? Is it that he may again come across my path; that he may make my life a living hell—my existence a torment and a mockery?"

Fiercely came the words from the full, red lips; and then, as if unable to restrain herself, she sprung to her feet, and paced up and down the room, with the same chafed and restless motion that the caged tiger treads the narrow limits of its prison.

"Oh! how I hate that man!" she cried, pausing for a moment in her restless walk and glaring into the vacancy of the air before her, as though she beheld there the face of the man of whom she spoke. "How I hate him that I once loved—loved as I never loved before, and I dare say will never love again. How the memory of the old time comes back to me! The passionate hours that passed so quickly away; hours of heavenly bliss that changed so soon to the torments of the region below. How often have I kissed those cruel lips—those lips that now I fear will work my ruin! But no, it shall not be!" She shut her teeth firmly together as she spoke, and the devilish glare came in her eyes.

"Once he has escaped me; the second time he shall not. If he crosses my line of life again let him look to himself, for I will not spare him. There is no power in this world that shall keep me from treading the path that I have marked out for myself. My future life shall be one wild dream of happiness—of triumph. When I am the wife of this old man, there is no woman in all this great city that shall eclipse me. I will lead them all. The poor, despised Lurlie—the daughter of 'Kankakee Joe,' the keeper of a low saloon—one of the worst of its class—will teach the wealthy of Chicago how to dress—how to be admired—to be envied. I know that I am beautiful!" and she paused before the glass and surveyed the handsome features reflected therein with pride, "that beauty will bring hundreds to my feet, willing slaves. Man is a fool generally where a woman is concerned. I will wind the poor, shallow idiots around my finger; break their hearts, crush their vanity, and then laugh at the triumph of my power." She smiled scornfully as she spoke. The picture was a pleasant one.

Lurlie Casper, the poor girl, is passed by, unheeded, in the street; scarcely a glance of admiration does she receive; but, Lurlie Middough, the wife of the wealthy captain, clad in silks, will make more than one turn their heads and take the second look. To-day I am poor—I am nothing; to-morrow I shall be rich, then I shall be a saint. The man who wrote that 'charity covers a multitude of sins,' should have added that a golden mask covers all crimes. Dazzle the eyes of the world with the yellow, glittering dross and they are blind to aught else. Let me be but true to myself and the future will be one long dream of joy. No more foolish weakness! I know my powers; let me use them rightly. Who could guess that this soft, white bosom hides a heart of fire? That the evil passions of a fiend burn within? I care for nothing but myself, naught else; self and self alone."

The girl was right. The demon of self-interest swayed her whole nature. But one man in all the world knew her for what in truth she was, a tiger in the form of a woman and with the face of an angel. And that man was the only being that had ever made her shrink with fear; that had ever proven that she could be made to tremble. That man was the one that she hated so bitterly, Bertrand Tasnor, the ex-"road-agent."

"What can detain Rick so long?" muttered Lurlie, thoughtfully. "Will he be able to trace this man? I think so, for he is a shrewd little imp. I must not lose track of this villain if I can help it."

A low knock sounded on the door.

"That must be the boy!" Lurlie cried, a gleam of joy on her face. "Come in," she said.

The door opened, and, as she had expected, Rick, the hunchback, entered.

"Well, did you follow him?" cried Lurlie, impatiently, not waiting for the boy to speak.

"Yes, mum," Rick replied, with a cunning leer.

"Where did he go to?" she asked, in breathless anxiety.

"Down to the Clark street dock."

"And then?"

"He went on board of a propeller, the 'Lake Bird,' he's goin' up the lake in her to-night; so he told the man wot was in the office."

"Where is he going?"

"To Mackinaw. He said he had an interest in the lumber business up there. I heard him tell the feller so," and Rick grinned, as though proud of his watchfulness as he spoke.

"To Mackinaw," said Lurlie, absently; "that is far off—"

"Yes, mum," said Rick, "way off up in the woods, somewhere."

"Can it be that he did not recognize me?" murmured Lurlie, to herself, in doubt, "or is he willing that I should go my way free? I can hardly believe that, for I know his nature too well. I am sure that he hates me fully as much as I do him. He must know that the blow that came so near his life last night came from me. Is he then a man to go quietly away without trying to return that blow? No, I know him too well to believe that. What then can be the meaning the movement which takes him far from me?" For a few moments Lurlie pondered over the difficult question in silence. Her earnest face and puzzled look showed plainly how deeply she was interested.

"Ah! I have it!" she muttered—still communing with herself—as a sudden thought flashed across her brain. "This is a trick—a trap wherein to catch me. He wishes to throw me off my guard. To make me believe either that he did not recognize me, or else, that, recognizing me, he does not care to measure his wits against mine. He must have discovered that the boy was following him and suspected that I set him on the watch. This must be the explanation of his conduct; it is the only reasonable one."

"Rick," she said, aloud, and turning to the boy, "did this stranger discover that you were following him?"

"No, mum," answered the boy, promptly.

"Are you sure?" questioned Lurlie, somewhat puzzled.

"Yes, mum, werry sure," said Rick, without a bit of hesitation.

"But, he may have noticed you without your seeing him."

"Why, he never turned round."

"And you are sure that he did not suspect that you were following him?" said Lurlie, who was bewildered at the intelligence.

"Yes, mum," said the hunchback, decidedly. "He went right down to the dock—right straight from here; I follered 'way on ahind; so he couldn't see me if he had a-turned round, but he didn't, nary time. Arter he inquired on the boat, I shied off home, 'cos I thought that I had found out all you wanted to know."

"Yes, that is all I wanted," said Lurlie, absently.

Rick watched her face, covertly, from beneath his beetling eyebrows. There was a cunning leer on his features, that possibly would have added to Lurlie's uneasiness had she noticed it. But she did not. She was trying, but vainly, to find a reason for the strange action on the part of Bertrand Tasnor.

"When does the boat go?" said Lurlie, at length.

"To-night at seven o'clock. I see'd it on a bill, just over the bridge," said the boy.

"To-night, then, at seven, Rick, you go down to the dock and see if this man goes on the boat."

"Yes, mum."

"Then come back instantly and tell me."

"Yes, mum, I will," replied the boy.

"That is all then; you can go, Rick." Mechanically the words came from the lips of the girl. Her thoughts were far away. A dim sense of danger was hanging over her. She had a dark foreboding that the action of Bertrand menaced harm to her. That, like the tiger, he was only recoiling to make his spring more certain. But, how to guard against that danger she knew not. Her thoughts were groping in the dark; no ray of light shot across her bewildered brain.

With a noiseless step, Rick left the room. There was a something of the snake about all the actions of the hunchback.

Once outside he closed the door carefully behind him. Then he doubled up his dirty fist and shook it menacingly in the air. The direction indicated clearly that the menace

was intended for Lurlie.

"You didn't give me nothing, neither," he whined, softly. "You think I'm a-going to watch the cap' for you and for nothing, too! Maybe, I'll watch you for him, my lady, the fust thing you knows. You ain't a-going to have every thing your own way, not as I knows on."

Then having apparently relieved his mind, Rick slunk down-stairs.

Lurlie, after the departure of the hunchback, left alone with her own thoughts—which were a strange mingling of sweet and bitter—sat down by the window, and for a few moments drummed listlessly upon the window pane.

"I can not understand," she murmured, reflectively.

"Can it be that he is willing to leave me to follow my way through the world in peace? I can hardly believe it, and yet it looks like it. I shall know to-night when the boy returns. If he does leave Chicago in the 'Lake Bird,' it will be positive proof that he meditates no wrong to me, for, if he did, he would not leave the city. To-night I shall know, sure. Let me see: the captain—my future husband—"

and a tone of triumph swelled in her voice as she spoke—"will be here for me at eight, so he said. The boat sails at seven. Rick, then, will have time to see whether this man departs in her or remains in Chicago. If he leaves the city then I may breathe freely, but if he remains,"

and she drew a long breath as she spoke, "why then I am in danger. I shall know to-night though, and if it is to be war I must prepare to meet it. It will be strange, indeed, if my woman's wits are not a match for his—cool, desperate, villain though he be. Time will show, however. Now I must prepare to leave this den of misery. To-morrow I shall shine in Michigan avenue, the honored wife of Captain Middough. The worm will become a butterfly. I must take care, though, that my wings are not singed by the fiery breath of Bertrand Tasnor."

The day passed slowly away to Lurlie. Eagerly and anxiously she watched the hands of the clock as they, at a snail's pace—so it seemed to her—crept lazily around the dial.

The hour of seven came at last. Darkness began to veil in the busy streets of the great city. The lights slowly appeared in the windows, one by one.

If the previous hours had seemed long to Lurlie, the sixty minutes that intervened between seven and eight appeared to the restless spirit of the woman as long as all the rest put together.

"Which will come first?" she murmured, as impatiently she paced the room. "Will it be Rick or the captain? Will I receive the news that my enemy has gone or that my marriage waits? Oh! will eight never come?"

Anxiously she watched the face of the clock. Slowly the hands marked the minutes. The loud tickings of the clock was answered by the pulsating throb of the fiery heart that beat within her breast—that heart which could melt with all the warm tenderness of woman's love or burn with all the fierce passion of a demon's hate.

At last the hands noted the hour of eight. Lurlie's heart gave a great throb of joy when she looked at the dial and noted the time.

"A short hour and I shall commence my career of triumph. One little hour and I shall be the wife of Captain Middough; but—oh! why does not Rick come that I may know whether Bertrand has left Chicago or not? I can not breathe in peace if he remains. Even his presence in the city, though out of my sight, will cast a dark cloud over my life."

A vigorous knock rattled the door. "I got the license, noon; every thing therefore is ready for the ceremony. So as soon as you are ready, we'll go. I am anxious for my happiness. It will be a minute for me, darling, when I call you wife."

"And that will be within an hour," Lurlie said, softly, and a burning blush suffused her face.

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE MARRIAGE.

LURLIE'S heart beat high and the bright color flushed her wax-like cheeks.

She knew the knock full well. It was given by the brawny hand of the captain of the "Michigan."

"Come in," she said, softly, but she knew that the anxious ears of her sailor-lover would catch the words.

Middough entered the room. As he came in the glare of the gaslight, his stalwart form

clad in a complete suit of black broadcloth, his snowy-white hair and flowing beard strongly contrasted with the somber hue of his wedding-suit and the joyous light sparkling in his clear eyes, few would have guessed him to be over fifty years of age."

His honest face expanded in a glad smile as he looked upon Lurlie, who rose joyously to receive him.

The girl was glad in a simple white dress; a little knot of blue ribbon at the neck was the only ornament. The dress and colors became the blue eyes and golden hair of the girl. She looked as fresh, as young and as innocent as one of Rafael's Madonnas, straying from the painter's canvas.

The eyes of the old man glistened with pride as he looked upon the slight form and the girlish face before him.

He held out his hands; eagerly Lurlie ran to him.

He drew her to his broad breast and caressed the golden locks, tenderly; caressed her as if she had been his daughter instead of his promised wife.

Confidingly Lurlie nestled in his arms, and looked up into his face with the blue eyes that seemed so full of love and trust.

The old captain felt that he was supremely happy. No joy that the world could give him could much exceed the present one.

"I wish I were thirty years younger for your sake," he said, as he twined his fingers in the crisp, golden curls.

"Why so?" she asked, a look of simulated wonder appearing in the soft blue eyes.

"Because then I might be able to make you happier," he said, honestly. "I should be nearer your own age, and of course would be more suitable to you."

"I do not see how that can be," murmured Lurlie, softly, and giving him a short, quick glance with her blue eyes, that seemed to set his heart in a flame, although that heart had been chilled by the snows of many winters. But the snows, though they had whitened his locks thoroughly, had not so thoroughly chilled his heart. That still beat with passion's fires called into life by the bright eyes of the girl who reposed upon his breast.

"By Jove!" cried the captain, impulsively, "I believe that you will make me young again. Your love will renew my youth. I am an old man, Lurlie; but I have never loved any woman as I love you. Now I know truly what love is. Lurlie, I shall try to make you the happiest little woman in all Chicago. There will not be many things in this world that I shall not give you."

"Your love is all I want," said Lurlie, softly.

"That you have already!" cried the captain, in joy. His nature, though an honest one, was trained in a worldly school. Like many others he believed in buying woman's love, as if love could be bought, or, being bought, was worth the having.

"If I can't give all the passionate tenderness of a young husband, I can give you all the care and attention of an old one. I will be both husband and father—watch over you with a father's care, and love you with a husband's tenderness."

"Oh! I know I shall be so happy with you, for I feel that I love you so much!" she said. And then, as if impelled by a sudden thought, she threw her arms around the neck of the old captain and imprinted a warm kiss upon his lips.

Middough had never been so thrilled.

"The carriage is at the corner of the street," he said. "I thought it better to leave it there and not excite attention and remark by driving up before the door."

"Yes, it is better," Lurlie responded.

"I got the license, and called on the minister this afternoon; every thing, therefore, is ready for the ceremony. So as soon as you are ready, we'll go. I am anxious for my happiness. It will be a joyous minute for me, darling, when I call you wife."

"And that will be within an hour," Lurlie said, softly, and a burning blush overspreading her cheeks.

"And then in this world we will never part till the dark angel calls me from you."

"I hope that will be many, many years hence," Lurlie added, earnestly.

Who could have guessed from her words or manner that she was not speaking the truth?

"Are you ready?" the captain asked.

"Yes, all but putting on my hat and cloak; they are in the closet. It will take me but a moment to put them on."

Lurlie, releasing herself gently, from the arms of the old

man, ran to the closet and got her things.

Tenderly and carefully the captain wrapped the dark cloak around her shapely little shoulders.

The cloak completely hid her white dress.

Middough again drew her to his arms and pressed a loving kiss upon her rosy lips.

A little knock came at the door.

Quick as the lightning's flash the thought came to Lurlie that it must be Rick. Here then was an end to her anxiety. She would know whether Bertrand had left Chicago or remained in the city. Whether the cloud—which she felt sure was hanging over her head—was about to burst and dart its lightnings upon her now or in the future.

"Will you excuse me for a moment?" she asked.

"Certainly," said the captain, gallantly.

"I will be back in a moment." Then she glided from his arms, hastened to the door, opened it and left the room.

The captain watched her little figure until the closing door hid her from his sight.

"An angel, by Jove!" he cried, heartily.

In the entry, as Lurlie had expected, she found Rick.

A shrewd grin came over the features of the hunchback as the girl approached him.

"Did you see him?" questioned Lurlie, anxiously.

"Yes, mum," the boy answered.

"And did he go in the boat?"

"Yes, mum."

"You are sure that you have made no mistake?"

"Yes, mum; I waited on the dock till I see'd him coming, then I followed him in the crowd on board the boat, and I see'd him buy his ticket at the office for Mackinaw. I heard him give his name, too, and in course you'll know by that whether I make any mistake."

"Yes, yes!" cried Lurlie, anxiously; "what name did he give?"

"Bertrand Tasnor," replied the boy, promptly.

"Yes, that is right. You are sure that he did not leave the boat before she sailed?"

"No, 'cos I see'd him arter she cast off and put out into the stream."

"On board?"

"Yes, mum."

"You are a good boy, Rick—a good, faithful boy!" exclaimed Lurlie, her face showing her pleasure at the news.

"Here's a dollar for you," and Lurlie took a note from her pocket-book and gave it to him.

"Thank you, mum; I'm very much obliged," said Rick, pocketing the bill, and a shrewd twinkle gleaming in his little eyes. "Is that all you want me to do?"

"Yes," replied Lurlie.

Then the boy took his way, slowly, down the stairs.

For a moment, Lurlie remained motionless, in deep thought. Her brow was now clear; no deep wrinkles furrowed its fair surface. The ugly lines at the corners of the eyes and mouth were gone. The face was that of a joyous girl of sixteen.

"At last my pathway is clear!" she cried, in exultation.

"This terrible man has taken the baleful shadow of his form from me! Now I can become this old man's wife without fear. Even if Bertrand should discover me, after my marriage, I shall be too powerful for him. He will not dare to attack me. I shall have gold—gold that I can run as freely from my hands as though it was but water. The sunbeams will again light up my life. Perhaps, too, in the future, I may discover the treasure that I abandoned long years ago. Oh, how I have wept in the still night hours when I thought of my baby that a cruel fortune compelled me to leave to the cold mercies of the world. Heaven knows I have repented the step bitterly enough. It is a wonder that my face still retains its youth and freshness, for I have endured misery enough to have made an old woman of me. I mustn't give way to such thoughts as these!" she cried, suddenly and with determination. "The future is bright enough; let me not think then of the past, that has been so dark and gloomy."

Then, with a bright step and a happy face, as if by the mere exercise of her will she could chase the black shadows from her heart, she returned to the room where she had left Captain Middough.

The old man had seated himself by the window, and was vainly endeavoring to subdue his impatience by gazing out upon the darkness.

"I am all ready now," said Lurlie, taking up her little hat and fastening it upon her head; the little golden curls peeping out coquettishly from under the brim.

The old lover sprung to his feet with all the quickness of youth.

"Come, then," he said; "I am impatient for the time when I shall have the right to call you mine alone, and guard you forever afterward from the harm and bitterness of this world."

Arm in arm the two left the house.

At the corner of the street stood the hack that had brought the sailor.

Middough assisted Lurlie into the coach; then followed her.

"Drive to 822 Wabash avenue," he said to the coachman.

The man nodded assent, closed the coach-door, and mounting the box whipped up his horses.

The coach drove off.

Hardly had the coach started, when a dark, imp-like form, that had been lurking in a doorway near the corner, sprung forward into the street and followed the coach at a smart run. Rick—for the pursuer of the hack was the hunchback—soon overtook it, and, with a bound, leaped nimbly upon the rack behind.

"A ride free—gratis for nothing," he muttered, with a grin that stretched his mouth from ear to ear.

The coach, a half an hour afterward, drew up before the house in Wabash avenue.

The old man had explained to Lurlie that they were going to the house of the minister who presided over the church which he attended.

The two entered the house and the door closed behind them.

Rick quietly dismounted from his perch and approached the driver.

"Say, mister, kin you tell me who lives in here?" and he pointed to the house that the two had entered.

"In course I kin, sonny," said the driver. "Mr. Hatplain, the minister."

When Middough and Lurlie—now Mrs. Middough—came out and entered the hack, Rick slyly resumed his perch.

The hunchback watched as the two entered the sailor's mansion on Michigan avenue; and then, with a grin, departed.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NEW PASSION.

FOR three days had Lurlie Casper been the wife of Lemuel Middough.

The old man had kept his word. All that wealth could procure he lavished upon the young girl. He seemed to anticipate her wishes. He was proud, too, of his young bride, and was desirous that his friends should know what a treasure he had secured. So the three days had been spent in one round of visits. The old sailor despised the formal rules of society, and, with his girl wife, called upon his friends without ceremony.

All admired the blooming bride—so fair and fresh in her girlish loveliness.

All, too, wondered that she—a mere child as it were—should marry a man old enough to be her father. But, shrewdly they guessed that the wealth of Lemuel Middough had something to do with the love that his young bride seemed to bear him.

Wirt Middough, living as he did in the same house, naturally was thrown much in the society of Lurlie.

Wirt was not astonished when—at the breakfast-table—the next morning after the marriage, he was presented by his uncle to the future mistress of the Middough household; but he was astonished at the appearance of the bride. He had expected that his uncle's wife would be some scheming adventuress—some woman of the world, able and willing to cope with any fortune—one who had entrapped the old sailor into a marriage solely for his money; but lo! here was a young girl, apparently not out of her teens! A child in years, all youth, all loveliness, and all innocence.

Wirt was puzzled. He could not understand it.

"Why, in Heaven's name," he said to himself in wonder, "didn't I come across such a divine piece of womanhood as this Lurlie? What on earth induced her to marry this grizzled, old, fresh-water sea-dog, when there are plenty of good-looking young men around? I wonder if the old man's bank account had any thing to do with it? I thought that the old horse-marine would get taken in and done for, but I'm blessed if he hasn't got the worth of his money."

All the facts in relation to his uncle's wife Wirt confided to Edmund Kelford; and he, anxious to see such a paragon of loveliness, called upon the old captain, in company with Wirt, and spent the whole afternoon there.

Kelford was as astonished as Wirt at the blooming beauty of the old sailor's wife.

He thought that he had never looked upon such a divine face before. It was more the beauty of an angel than that of a human.

"What do you think of her?" asked Wirt, after they had left the house and were leisurely strolling down-town.

"Well, I don't know exactly what to think of her," replied Kelford, thoughtfully.

"Don't you think that she is pretty?" Wirt said.

"Yes, more than pretty; she is beautiful," replied Kelford in rapture—"very beautiful!"

"Hullo!" exclaimed Wirt, astonished; "that's going it pretty strong!"

"Ah! but she fully deserves such praise!" cried Kelford. "I think that hers is the most lovely face that I have ever seen."

"Prettier than Miss Pearl's?" asked Wirt, shyly.

Kelford's brow clouded up at the mention of the sewing-girl's name, and it was a moment or so before he replied.

"No," he said, at last, "I do not exactly mean that she is prettier than Pearl, although, at the first 'glance' almost any one would pronounce her to be. Her style of beauty is different from that of the other. This one impresses you on the instant. The first glance at her face, and you say, 'how beautiful!' With Pearl, it is quite different. When you first look at her face, you say, 'she is pretty.' When you have seen her three or four times, you say she is 'very pretty.' And when you come to know her, to speak with her, you say, 'she is beautiful.' Little by little her face wins upon you. You commence by merely looking at her, and end by adoring her; while, with this one—"

"You begin by adoring her, eh?" said Wirt, laughing.

"Yes, that is the truth."

"Take care that you don't carry your admiration too far, for I don't doubt that the jolly old governor will be tolerably jealous of his child-wife; and, besides, there's Miss Pearl, the sworn idol of your heart."

A mournful smile came over Kelford's face at the joking remark of his friend.

Wirt noticed it.

"Why, what's the matter, old fellow? I haven't touched you in a tender place, have I? You and your lady-love haven't quarreled, I hope?"

"No."

"Well, what's the matter, then? How goes on your love affair, eh?"

"As the young count in the play of the 'Honeymoon' says: 'The best advancement I can boast of is that it goes not backward.'"

"That's bad."

"Yes, Wirt, the girl is a riddle that I can not understand. She acts as if she loves me, and yet her words give the lie to her actions. I almost despair of ever winning her." Kelford spoke seriously, and with quite a tinge of sorrow in his tone.

"Never say die!" cried Wirt, slapping his friend on the back, heartily. "Never give up the ship—*nil desperandum!* that's the motto to blazon on your flag! All women in this world can be won when the right man comes along. And I think that you are the right man for this girl."

"Well, I had hoped so," replied Kelford, quietly.

"Hope so still!" cried Wirt. "If she hasn't said 'no,' it's plain proof that some day she will say 'yes.' You can take my word for that."

"I confess that you encourage me."

"Of course. Just look at my uncle; see the prize that he has won in the marriage lottery! That ought to encourage you."

"She is a beautiful creature," said Kelford, with a sigh. "It's a great pity that I can't find one like her to make my life happy."

"If you had only seen her first, I'm afraid that the worthy navigator wouldn't have stood the ghost of a show. She seemed to take quite a fancy to you this afternoon. She seldom talks much, but she said more to you this afternoon than she ever did to any one else since I've known her."

"Which has been for the remarkably long time of three days," said Kelford, dryly.

"That's very true," replied Wirt; "but I tell you, I kept

my eyes on her pretty closely during that time."

"I don't doubt it," said Kelford, with a meaning smile.

"Oh, hang it! I ain't in love with her!" cried Wirt; "and you needn't insinuate so. But really—joking aside—I think she has taken quite a fancy to you."

"Do you think so?" asked Kelford, absently; yet, as he spoke, there came a feeling of joy in his heart. Perhaps it sprung from the vanity innate in all men's natures. It is but human that they should wish to inspire love in the breasts of the other sex, even when they know that that love is folly.

"Yes, I do indeed," Wirt replied, "and I really believe that it is my duty to caution the old gentleman upon the subject. Why, we shall have an elopement some fine morning; then all the outside barbarians will be gloating over it with big head-lines: 'Another Chicago Scandal—ten minutes for Divorces,' etc."

"There's no fear of that."

And the two friends, laughing, pursued their way down the street.

We will now visit the palace of the sailor, for it was a palace, though situated in one of the cities of our republic.

Seated in a low arm-chair by the window was Lurlie, now the wife of Lemuel Middough.

She was richly attired in lustrous silk, the color of which was the pure blue of the vaulted heavens above.

Lurlie had wondrous taste. She knew well what suited her blue eyes, golden hair and waxy cheeks.

If the girl had looked pretty before, when in a plain dress, and surrounded by the dark, dingy walls of the Kankakee House, she looked divinely beautiful now, as she sat in the embrace of the cushioned arm-chair. The last dying rays of the sun poured in through the curtained window and flooded the room with its golden rays. They played upon the queenly little head of Lurlie, kissing the curling locks, and encircling the head with a halo of light like those that played around the brows of the saints of the olden time.

Lurlie was playing listlessly with the silken cord of the window curtain, her eyes wandering carelessly out of the window upon the broad avenue before her.

One person alone besides Lurlie was in the apartment.

It was Lurlie's maid. A dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, some two-and-twenty years old. A girl with a rather pretty face, but marred by the look of evil temper that was so plainly apparent there. She was called Aimee Cardon. She was of French extraction. Formerly she had been in the employ of Mrs. Kelford, Edmund's aunt.

The girl stood leaning on the back of an arm-chair, at a respectful distance from her mistress.

"And you lived in the family of Mr. Kelford?" said Lurlie.

The conversation had been in reference to the young man who had but a few minutes before departed.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the girl.

"Is Mr. Kelford married?" Lurlie asked, carelessly, as if merely by way of keeping up the conversation rather than from any interest in the subject.

"No, ma'am, not yet."

"Not yet? Is he engaged then?"

"No, ma'am, not exactly."

"I don't understand."

"I will tell you, ma'am. It's a secret," said the girl, mysteriously. "I heard Mr. Kelford and Mr. Wirt Middough talking about it one day. Mr. Kelford is in love with a poor girl who sews for her living in a dressmaker's shop on Clark street. He is desperately in love with her, and wants to make her his wife."

"And will she not consent?" asked Lurlie, in wonder. Having sold herself for gold, she was astonished that any other girl should hesitate to do the same thing.

"Not yet, ma'am."

"She must be a fool, then," said Lurlie, contemptuously. "Is she pretty?"

"That's just as people think. I heard Mr. Wirt say she was."

"What is her name?"

"Pearl Cudlipp."

"An odd name."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Mr. Kelford is very rich, isn't he?"

"Yes, ma'am; he has more money than he knows what to do with," replied the girl.

"You may go, Aimee," said Lurlie; "I shall not want you till after supper."

The girl left the room.

Lurlie seemed lost in thought. Her eyes were gazing out of the window, but they saw no object there.

"Young, rich and handsome," she murmured; "ah! why did he not come across my path? He would have been the husband to suit me. He is the first man that I have seen since Bertrand Tasnor and I parted, years ago, that I felt that I could love. What am I talking about? I almost love him now! I have a rival, too. A poor girl. He must forget her and love me! But, how can he? Oh! I am bound in chains, golden ones, but still they are chains. But, if he can not be mine, he never shall be another's. He must—he shall forget this girl!"

"Loss of the 'Lake Bird'—the steamer burnt—only ten saved—*Evening Post!*" cried a newsboy on the avenue.

"The 'Lake Bird' lost! and Bertrand Tasnor was on that boat!" cried Lurlie, as she threw up the window and called the boy.

She tossed him a five-cent piece and eagerly seized the paper, then closed the window.

"Oh! that the fire and the water have accomplished what I failed to do—his death!" she cried, with a fierce joy.

CHAPTER XX.

LURLIE'S SCHEME.

EAGERLY she looked at the newspaper. It contained a brief account of the destruction of the propeller Lake Bird by fire, just above Glen Arbor. Ten only of those on board of the ill-fated steamer had succeeded in escaping the wreck.

With intense interest Lurlie read over the list of the names of those that had escaped. The name of Bertrand Tasnor was not in the list.

A cry of joy came from her lips.

"At last, then, I am free!" she exclaimed. "Bertrand Tasnor was the only being in all this world that I feared, and now he is dead—swallowed up by the waves. The only obstacle in my path is removed. Now I breathe freely!"

For a minute or so she paced up and down the sumptuous parlor, as if unable to remain quiet.

"I must see this girl who has infatuated this handsome Kelford!" she cried, suddenly, pausing in her walk. "Can she be as pretty as I am? Will she take the pains to win his love that I will? No; I am sure that she will not. Kelford must love me, even if a hard fortune prevents me from ever being his. But if I can win his love—there may be a way to break these chains that bind me to this old man. Oh! how I hate him!" she cried, fiercely. "I did not actually hate him until this young and handsome fellow came in my way. He is such a gentleman, too—one both by birth and breeding. Oh! if I could be his wife, instead of the mate of this old man! I begin to shrink now from my husband's caresses. I thought that, for the sake of wealth and splendor, I could bear any thing, but I find I can not. The human passions are still in my breast, and I can not conquer them. Now that Bertrand Tasnor is dead, there is no one else in this world that can make me tremble. I must see this girl—see what she is like. My rival!" And she laughed bitterly at the thought. "She must be a bold and daring woman that attempts to rival me. But how can I see her?" For a moment she mused over this difficult question.

"I know!" she cried, at last; "this girl, Aimee—she may be able to tell me something more in relation to the affair—tell me something that will aid me in my endeavor."

The entrance of her husband put an end to her musings.

"Well, little one, all alone, eh?" he said, advancing to her with outstretched arms.

"Yes," she said, in the soft, loving voice that had so won upon the old man's heart.

Caressingly the old sailor patted the little head with its wealth of golden ringlets.

"Ah! you are the dearest little woman in all the world. Are you happy as my wife, eh?" and he looked fondly into the depths of the lustrous blue eyes that were raised so confidently to his.

"Yes; do I not seem to be happy?" she asked.

"Of course," he replied. "I'm an old fool to ask such a question. I have given you every thing in the world that money could buy. If there is a wish of yours ungratified, let me know it, and I will try to remedy the want."

"There is nothing," she said, and laid her head down gently upon his broad breast as she spoke. The falsehood

came like truth from her lips, and the old man believed her. He little guessed that, even when her head was pillowed on his breast, and his hands were twined caressingly in her silken locks, another face than his was before her eyes—that another image filled her heart. He said truly that he had given her all that money could buy, but he had not given that for which her heart craved and which no money could buy, the passionate, fiery love of youth.

Then, as he parted the golden curls of the head, he saw on the scalp the great white scar of a fearful wound. The scar was fully four inches long. The blow must have been a terrible one to have left such a mark.

"Why, pet," said the old man, fondly, "you have had a terrible wound on your head."

Lurlie started at the words as though she had been bitten by a snake. The color left her cheeks, and a look of deadly pain came over face. The old man did not notice how much she was agitated, although he felt the slight form he held within his arms tremble violently.

"What is the matter?" he asked, soothingly.

"Nothing," she answered, recovering from her emotion. "I am foolish to give way to my fears. But, as you spoke, I seemed to feel the same pain that I felt when the wound was inflicted."

"What caused it?" he asked.

"In the darkness, going down-stairs, I slipped and fell from the top to the bottom, striking my head against a corner of the wall; that made the wound," she answered, slowly.

"Poor child!" he said, patting the little head.

The old sailor was no surgeon, or a single glance would have told him that the wound from which came the scar was never produced by contact with the angle of a wall. But the explanation satisfied him, and he spoke no more of it.

In a short time the supper-bell rung.

Supper over, Lurlie excused herself under the plea of a headache, and sought her room.

There she found her waiting-maid, Aimee.

Lurlie commenced a conversation, her intent being to finally lead it to the subject nearest her heart—the love of Edmund Kelford for the sewing-girl, Pearl Oudlipp.

Suddenly, as if she had guessed her mistress's intention, Aimee spoke of Edmund Kelford.

"Don't you think it strange, ma'am," she said, "that a gentleman with all the money that Mr. Kelford has should fall in love with a poor girl?"

"Yes, it is strange," Lurlie replied; "but perhaps she is very pretty."

"No, she isn't what I call beautiful," said the girl, turning up her nose most decidedly. "She's only got one pretty thing about her."

"And what is that?" Lurlie asked, with curiosity.

"Her eyes."

"Her eyes?"

"Yes; she has very pretty eyes. They are very large, gray eyes. They have a strange look in them. I can't describe them very well, but they look like a river when the wind blows over it—they seem to move all the time."

"I suppose what people would call lustrous eyes," said Lurlie, looking full into the girl's face.

"Oh, ma'am!" cried the girl, suddenly.

"Well, what is it?" asked Lurlie, somewhat astonished at the girl's manner.

"Why, your eyes, ma'am—"

"What of them?"

"They are just like her eyes!"

"Like hers?" said Lurlie, amazed.

"Yes, exactly alike; only hers are gray, and yours are blue, but they have the same expression."

"That is strange."

"Yes, it is," repeated the girl.

"When did you see this girl?"

"It was only a little while ago. You see, ma'am, when I heard Mr. Wirt and Mr. Kelford talking about the girl, and Mr. Kelford saying how well he loved her, and how much he wanted to marry her, though she was only a poor girl, I thought that I would like to see her, and see what she looked like. So, as I heard Mr. Wirt speak about the shop being on Clark street, near Madison, I thought I would be able to find it. One day I went on purpose. I found it just as easy as could be. I went in and bought some thread, and I asked the young lady if her name wasn't Pearl? I said

that a friend of mine recommended me to the store where she served."

"And you did not think that she was beautiful?" Lurlie said.

"No, ma'am," replied the girl; "except the eyes. She has pretty eyes."

"Is she tall or short?"

"Tall, ma'am, I think—I don't remember exactly. But I'm sure that she's not short."

"Light or dark hair?"

"Dark, ma'am."

For a few moments Lurlie did not speak, but sat buried in silence. The girl watched her covertly.

"Do you know, Aimee, that you have excited my curiosity by speaking about this girl?" she said, suddenly. "I can not understand how Mr. Kelford, who seems to be a gentleman of great taste, can fall in love with a girl that is not beautiful."

"And as poor as poverty, too, ma'am," cried the girl, quickly.

"That does not make so much difference, Aimee," said Lurlie, a little bit of scorn perceptible in the corners of her mouth as she spoke. "Let a man get infatuated with a woman's pretty face, and he will not be apt to ask whether she is rich or poor; that is, I mean, such a man as Mr. Kelford, who has money enough already."

"That's very true, ma'am," observed the girl.

"There must be something about her to attract him, for he is very far from being a fool."

"Perhaps he thinks she is pretty; there's no accounting for tastes, you know, ma'am. She's a perfect lady; that I will say for her, but she ain't what I call pretty."

"I should really like to see her," said Lurlie, as if the idea had just come into her mind.

"Nothing easier, ma'am."

"How so?"

"Why, just put on your hat and cloak and come with me. We can go to the store just as if we were going to buy something, or we can buy some little thing, and then you'll have a chance to take a good look at her and no one the wiser."

"But, how can we get there?" Lurlie asked.

"Cross over to State street and take a car right downtown to Madison street, then we can walk up to Clark. It's only a few blocks, ma'am."

Aimee spoke as though she thought Lurlie to be a perfect stranger in Chicago, and so, indeed, she considered her, as did everybody else.

On bringing home his bride, the old man had told every one that he had caught a country girl, and no one of the aristocratic circle on Michigan avenue with whom she mingled, guessed that the honored and courted wife of the wealthy Captain Middough was the daughter of Kankakee Joe, of Wells street. Oh! how the silk and broadcloth would have shrunk from her side if they had known the truth! Even the gold of the old sailor would hardly have sufficed to cover up the shame of the Sailor Boarding-house.

"I've half a mind to go," said Lurlie, as if undecided.

"Oh, do go, ma'am. It will be such fun!" cried the girl.

"Very well; I will go, but my husband may miss me."

"We'll be back in an hour. He won't be likely to come up-stairs before two."

"Get me a dark dress, and my hat and cloak—the plainest I have."

The old man had provided his young bride with a bountiful wardrobe.

Lurlie was soon dressed and ready for the nocturnal expedition.

The two descended the stairs, opened the front door and gained the street without notice. Then they proceeded rapidly in the direction of State street, Aimee, the maid, leading the way.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RIVALS.

HARDLY had the two girls turned into the cross street leading from the avenue, when two dark forms crossed over

from the other side of Michigan avenue and followed them. Apparently the two had been watching the house of the old captain, but, for what purpose it would not be easy to guess.

The girls hurried onward, unconscious of the two following them so stealthily. They reached State street, got on a car that happened to be passing just at the minute, and thus proceeded down town.

The two dark forms also boarded the car—they getting on the front platform as if they shunned recognition.

At Madison street Lurlie and her companion got out. The two on the front platform followed, still keeping well out of sight of the two girls.

Lurlie, guided by the maid—although in truth she knew the way as well as the other—went down Madison street and then turned into Clark. A few steps on and they came to the dressmaker's shop kept by Mrs. Jones, and wherein the sewing girl, Pearl Cudlipp, worked.

"This is the place, ma'am," said the maid, as they stopped before the window of the little shop.

"Do you see the girl?" Lurlie asked.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Aimee, peering through the window; "there she is behind the counter. Wouldn't you like to go in, then you can see exactly what she looks like?"

"Yes, I will go in," Lurlie replied.

"You can buy something, you know, ma'am—a spool of thread or any thing like that. Then you'll have a chance to have a good look at her."

"Come, then," and Lurlie entered the store, followed by her maid.

The two who had followed them had crossed over to the other side of the street, and there, sheltered by a convenient doorway, watched the two girls narrowly.

"What the devil can she want here?" muttered the taller of the two, who seemed a giant in size compared to his pigmy companion.

"Pr'aps she wants some thread or a paper of pins," said the other, who was no other than Rick, the hunchback.

"It isn't very likely that she would take the trouble to come 'way here after a trifle. Lurlie is not a woman to take the trouble of this night's expedition without a motive for it, and a strong one too. I'll find out what it is, in time."

"She's going in," said Rick, who had never taken his eyes off of the two on the other side of the street.

"Yes," replied his tall companion, who, with his coat-collar turned up and a slouch hat drawn down over his eyes, would have puzzled anyone to have made out what he looked like.

"There is no mistake about it, Rick; she's married to the old captain. I saw the marriage notice in yesterday's *Tribune*," the tall one said, thoughtfully.

"I guessed that they were a-going in to get married when I followed 'em that night to the minister's house. And when the driver told me that it was a preacher's house, I felt sure of it."

"You're a smart lad, Rick; only keep your eyes about you, and your wits sharp, and I'll make your fortune in a year or so," said the disguised stranger, and then he added to himself, "or else send you to the State-prison or to the gallows. My tools are like the master that uses them, unlucky."

Just then a newsboy came along, crying his papers:

"'Ere's the *Evenin' Post*—loss of the 'Lake Bird'—only ten saved!"

"What's that?" cried the tall man, as the words of the boy fell upon his ears.

"'Lake Bird' lost?" cried Rick. "Why, that's the werry propeller—"

"—That Bertrand Tasnor sailed in for Mackinaw," cried the stranger, completing the sentence.

"Yes," said Rick, with a grin.

"Ten saved, eh? I wonder if Bertrand was among the rescued ones? I wager all I have in the world—and that isn't much—that his name don't appear in the list of those that escaped."

"I should wonder," said Rick with another grin.

"I must see." Then the stranger bought a paper, and stepping out into the circle of light that came from a neighboring window, ran his eye down the list of the names of those that had escaped from the wreck.

"Just as I thought!" cried the stranger, after looking over the list carefully. "There's no such name here as Bertrand

Tasnor. Therefore, as Bertrand Tasnor sailed in the 'Lake Bird,' Bertrand Tasnor about this time must be at the bottom of Lake Michigan. Poor devil—he always was unlucky!" and the man laughed bitterly as he spoke. Rick re-echoed the laugh.

"How this woman will rejoice when she learns that the man she hates so fiercely is dead—out of her way forever! How she will bless the fire and the water, the two deadly enemies that seem to have combined expressly to do her will and kill the man that she feared. She *must* see this news. It will take a load from her heart. She has nothing to fear, now that Bertrand is dead, so she will think, but, the arm of Captain Death—as the miners called him—is a long one, and it may strike her even from the tomb."

Rick listened attentively while the other was speaking. The words were loud enough for the boy to hear, though the speaker was communing with himself.

"Oh, she knows that he went in the 'Lake Bird,'" said Rick, adopting the idea of the man, which pleased the odd humor of the hunchback, "cos I told her so, and she seemed tickled about it."

"Yes, and that moment of joy will be seasoned by many a one of sorrow," said the man, coolly, but there was a fierceness in his tone that boded no good to the wife of Lemuel Middough.

Leaving the two watchers on the corner, we will cross the street and follow Lurlie and her maid into the little shop.

"Have you Coates' thread, No. 60?" asked Lurlie, of Pearl, who came forward to wait upon the customers.

"Yes, miss," said Pearl, taking down the box that held the thread, and displaying the contents before her customers.

There was something in the tones of the girl's voice—that sounded strangely familiar to Lurlie's ears. Vainly she puzzled her brains to remember.

"Can it be possible that I have met this girl somewhere before?" she mused. "Her face, too, is familiar. It seems as if I had seen it somewhere. I can not understand it; I can not remember. It seems like a dream."

Lurlie paid for her thread; then Aimee took up considerable time in selecting some collars and cuffs, asking Pearl's advice in regard to the matter—advice which the young girl freely gave. And all this time, Lurlie watched Pearl intently, and tried to think where she had seen or met her before, or if not her, some one that looked like her.

Aimee at last was suited, paid for her purchases and the two left the store.

"What do you think of her, ma'am?" asked Aimee, the moment they were outside of the little shop.

"I think that she is pretty, though perhaps she can not strictly be called beautiful."

"That's what I say!" cried the waitingmaid, in triumph. "She ain't beautiful a bit, and what Mr. Kelford can see in her, I can't see."

"Where *can* I have seen her before?" murmured Lurlie, half to herself and half aloud.

"Why, did you ever see her before, ma'am?" asked the girl, in wonder.

"That is what I can not tell," said Lurlie, in doubt.

"Her face is very familiar to me; I feel sure that I have seen her somewhere in the past, yet I can not guess where or when."

"That is strange, ma'am."

"Very strange, for I never forget a face."

"Maybe you have seen some one that looks like her?" suggested the girl.

"That is possible, yet I can not remember who it was, or where."

"Well, she looks just like you, about the eyes, though hers are a different color," said the waitingmaid.

"Ah!" cried Lurlie, sharply, and she stopped suddenly in her walk and put her hand to her heart, as if struck with a sudden pain.

"What's the matter, ma'am?" cried the girl, in alarm.

Lurlie's face was as white as the face of a corpse. Even her lips were bloodless, and the glassy stare of her eyes was terrible to look upon.

Aimee quickly put her arm around the waist of her mistress. She thought that Lurlie was about to faint.

"What is the matter, ma'am?" The maid began to be frightened.

"Nothing," said Lurlie, hoarsely, and striving to cast off the deathlike chill that hung around her heart.

"Why, you look sick—deathly sick, ma'am!" cried the girl.

"It is nothing—I am better now," said Lurlie, with a

great effort. "It was only a sudden pain in my heart; I am subject to them at times. Let us go on."

And with a slow step they walked onward.

Aimee saw plainly that her mistress still was suffering, though not so keenly as at the moment of the shock.

"I know now what that girl's face reminds me of," Lur lie said, after they had walked on a little way in silence.

"You do?" cried the girl, in wonder.

"Yes."

"Then you have seen some one that she looks like?"

"Yes; my mother," Lur lie answered, slowly.

"Your mother!" said Aimee, in wonder.

"Yes, my mother," repeated Lur lie.

"Is she living, ma'am?"

"No; she died when I was only ten years old. This girl is almost the very image of her, except that my mother's hair was lighter, and her eyes were a grayish-blue, instead of being pure gray like the eyes of this girl."

"Was that what made you feel sick, ma'am?" asked the girl, inquiringly.

"Yes, I suppose so," Lur lie replied. "It flashed upon me, all in an instant. Then at once I understand why the face of this girl affected me so strangely."

"But, don't you think it strange that Mr. Kelford should fall in love with her?" asked the girl.

"Yes, but strange things happen in this world," Lur lie responded.

The two retracing their steps to State street, there took a car and proceeded up-town.

They had been followed closely by Rick and the stranger, who had watched them from the opposite corner. As before, they rode on the platform forward, so that Lur lie would not be apt to see them.

Lur lie and the girl left the car at the cross-street. Again the two watchers followed.

The door of the Middough mansion received the two girls and hid them from sight.

"So, that is the nest where my game has found shelter!" cried the tall stranger. "To-morrow, Miss Lur lie, now Mrs. Captain Middough, will be honored by a call from me. We need money, Rick, and yonder is the woman who must find it!"

CHAPTER XXII.

A MIRACULOUS APPEARANCE.

LUR LIE sat in her richly-furnished chamber. All the comforts that money could purchase or taste devise surrounded her. She had reached the goal of her ambition, and yet she was far from being happy.

One thing she lacked and that was peace of mind.

"Oh! how I hate these golden chains," she murmured. "I almost wish that I was free, even though the gratification of that wish would give me back again to poverty and want. I have now all that money can procure, but I want something more. I crave the love of Edmund Kelford. I am sure he likes me. I am sure that I can make him love me if I but try my powers upon him. Oh! if I were but free!" Deep and earnest came the wish from her lips.

"Let me not despair. If I can but make Edmund love me, I am sure that I can find some way to escape from the bonds that bind me to Captain Middough. But, Kelford is in love with this young girl, Pearl. He must forget her. She herself aids my plan by repulsing him. It is strange what an impression her eyes made upon me. If I can not win my idol while the girl is in the way, she must be removed. When she is gone he will forget her. Absence conquers love they say; but, sometimes, the truth is, that it strengthens it. But this is the pure, the holy love that I can not feel. The passion that fills my breast comes from a heart of fire. It is so fierce that in time it destroys itself. Oh, how my heart rejoiced when I read the news that told me that Bertrand Tasnor was dead. He alone in all this world I feared, and now he sleeps peacefully beneath the dark waters. His cold, cruel nature will no more work me harm. It was a strange chance that brought him in contact with me after we had been separated so many years. Now I breathe freely."

A knock sounded on the door; then, in obedience to Lur lie's words, a servant entered.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, Mrs. Middough," said the servant.

"Who is it?" asked Lur lie.

"I don't know, ma'am."

"Did he not give his name?"

"No, ma'am; I asked him for it, but he said that he was a stranger to you, and that you would not know it."

"And he wishes to see me?" asked Lur lie in astonishment.

"Yes, ma'am, on very particular business, so he said."

"There must be some mistake. It is probably Captain Middough that he wishes to see."

"Oh, no, ma'am," replied the servant, quickly. "Because I asked him if he didn't wish to see Mr. Middough and he said no; that it was you he wished to see. He's a rather roughly-dressed man, and I thought it might be some one from the captain's boat."

A strange presentiment of danger filled Lur lie's heart as the words of the servant fell upon her ears. She could not guess what any roughly-dressed man should wish to see her for.

"Where is he?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"In the parlor, ma'am," the servant replied. "I told James to keep an eye on him and see that he didn't walk off with any thing."

"I suppose I had better go and see who it is."

With many a strange fear in her heart—though why she should fear, she could not tell—Lur lie descended the stairs.

She entered the brilliantly lighted parlor.

A man roughly-attired sat in a cushioned arm-chair with his back to her, gazing out of the window.

A single glance Lur lie gave, and then the hard lines appeared at the corners of her eyes and mouth; the demon light sparkled in her eyes; the little white hands clenched together till the blood almost started from the quick of the nails.

In one glance she had recognized the stranger.

Hearing her footfall on the carpet—light and almost noiseless as it was—the stranger wheeled around in his chair and displayed the handsome face of Bertrand Tasnor.

"Living!" Lur lie gasped, with a stony glance, as though she wished with her eyes to strike him dead. But, Bertrand Tasnor had seen those eyes before; he was not easily appalled.

With a quiet smile he looked upon the white face of the angry woman. The angel had vanished from the woman's features, and the tiger reigned therein. The eyes were flashing living fires.

"Am I alive?—I believe you intended the exclamation for a question—well, to the best of my knowledge and belief, I am," he said, slowly, and with quiet sarcasm. "But, why did you suppose me dead?"

Lur lie did not answer the question, but stood and looked upon Bertrand with the passionate eyes that could look so fond with love, and were now glaring so fierce with hate.

"Is it possible that you have heard of the loss of the 'Lake Bird'? Is it possible that you knew that I was a passenger on board of that ill-fated vessel? I can not understand how you could know this, unless you set a spy to dog my footsteps when I left the hospitable shelter of the Kankakee House. Did you do so?" And Bertrand laughed—a quiet, silent laugh as he put the question.

As before, the girl did not reply. Bertrand's presence seemed to chill her into stone.

"You will not be questioned, eh?" said Bertrand, after a pause. "Then I'll answer for you. You did set a spy to watch my footsteps. It was a wonderful interest for you to take in an utter stranger." And, as he spoke, he watched her face keenly with his cold, glittering eyes. But, the face of Lur lie was pale as marble. No change was there; one expression only—fierce, determined hate.

"You do not deny, I see, that I am a stranger to you."

"No," Lur lie said, mechanically, and even to herself her voice seemed strange and hard as she spoke.

"You do not deny it, and yet I'll wager that your memory is as good as mine," Bertrand said with bitter emphasis. Lur lie did not seem to heed either the tone or the words.

"You thought me dead—you need not answer, for I am sure of it. Therefore, when I entered the doors of the Kankakee House, a few nights ago, I must have seemed to you more like one risen from the tomb than a living man. I read the truth in your face—you know I am good in reading faces—and yours to me was like the pages of an open book. Then, conscious that I was living, you sought to discover if I had remembered you as you had remembered me. You discovered that my memory was not treacherous, and that you still lived in it, in glowing colors. You re-

solved to deal me a blow that should forever remove me from your path. Ah, Lurlie! few, to look at you, would guess that with the face of an angel you possessed the heart of a devil. But, I knew you—knew you of old. I guessed that you would seek my life, and I guarded against the attack. Then, in the morning, when I left the house, I detected that you had placed a spy upon me. I resolved to humor you in the belief that you could put a watch upon me without my being conscious of it. So I let your spy follow me. I took passage on the 'Lake Bird.' I wished you to have the idea that I was going far from Chicago. I wanted you to think yourself free. It was my game to have you marry this old man. I was afraid that if I remained in Chicago, you would not dare to do it. I sailed in the 'Lake Bird.' Your spy reported the fact. You believed—foolish woman—that I had forgotten the past—I, who never yet was known to forget or forgive! You thought yourself safe from all harm from me, and married this wealthy Middough. Had I had the chance to have spoken three words in the old captain's ear, he would have sooner wedded a fiend from the fires below than you! As I have said, you married, and even while your head was pillowed on your husband's breast—while your passionate kisses were on his lips—the 'Lake Bird' was in the embrace of the fire-fiend. Far from land, on the broad bosom of the water, the red flames held their sway. Do you know what a terrible thing it is to be on board of a ship of fire—to choose between a death by fire or a death by water—to be burnt up or to be drowned—no chance for life? The strong man, the weak woman and the nursing infant, all with the same dreadful fate staring them in the face?"

"And yet you escaped?" cried Lurlie, from between the white clenched teeth.

"Yes, I escaped; that I am here now is ample proof of that," replied Bertrand. "But, can you guess how I escaped?"

"No," said Lurlie, sullenly.

"I didn't go in the 'Lake Bird!'" said Bertrand, with a cool, quiet smile.

"What!" gasped Lurlie.

"I thought that I had better remain in Chicago and look after your fortunes. I had a presentiment that you would rise in the world, and I knew that you would not forget your old friends, particularly a friend like myself, who was once so near and dear to you. So, after we swung out into the stream, and I saw your spy depart—of course completely satisfied that I was bound for the pines of Mackinaw—I concluded that I had better get off. The boat made a landing just the other side of State street bridge and I seized the opportunity to depart. I had previously discovered that the boat would land there, and I thought that my device would be successful in throwing you off your guard, as it proved. Now, Lurlie, what is it to be—peace or war?"

"I do not understand your meaning," said the girl, slowly.

"Oh, I do not speak plain enough, eh?" said Bertrand, in his usual cool way. "I will remedy that error, and speak plainer. Just look at me."

It was hardly necessary to tell Lurlie to look at him, for the girl had not taken her glittering eyes from his face for a single moment.

"Don't you perceive a change in my personal appearance?" he asked. "I don't mean in my face, for that has changed of course. Many a rough day's work and many a wild night's carouse have left their indelible marks upon my features. Once my face was as white as yours; now it is browned almost to the hue of the Indian. But the heart, Lurlie, in my breast is still the same."

"But to return to my subject. The change I speak of is in my attire: look at it. What do I look like? A country man from the backwoods? Yes, that's more like it. Lurlie, I am in desperate circumstances; I want money."

"That is a very common want," the girl said, slowly.

"That is very true," replied Bertrand, cheerfully. "You have felt that want—felt it very recently, too, or you never would have married this old man."

"How do you know?" demanded Lurlie.

"Bah!" cried Bertrand, contemptuously; "do not try to deceive me; you will but waste your time, and gain nothing by it. I know you as well as you know yourself. You have not changed one particle in eighteen years. You are still the same fiery-hearted woman. I know that you can not love this old man. You have married him for his money. I do not blame you. Money is a very good thing to have in this

world. One does not discover how really valuable it is until he feels the want of it. With money, one is a king; without it, a beggar. Now I am a beggar, but soon, with your help, I will be a king!"

"With my help!" cried Lurlie, anger flaming up in her scintillant eyes.

"Yes, with your help," repeated Bertrand, tauntingly.

"Your husband, the old lake-captain, is rich, Lurlie. I must have some of his money."

"Never with my aid!" Lurlie cried.

"I want about five thousand dollars."

"From me?"

"Yes."

"You are dreaming!"

"No, you are; but you will awaken soon," Bertrand said, coolly. "Sit down and listen to me. Let me tell you a story of eighteen years ago. How a man whose heart was of ice loved a girl whose heart was of fire."

CHAPTER XXIII.

BERTRAND'S STORY.

FOR a moment Lurlie looked with angry eyes into the calm, passionless face of Bertrand; then, with an impatient gesture, she sunk into a cushioned arm-chair, near which she stood.

"Why will you force me to listen to what I do not care to hear?" she cried, impetuously.

"Because I wish it," he replied, coolly. "It is necessary to speak of the past, that we may decide upon our course of action toward each other in the future. So be patient, and listen to me."

"Go on, then, since you will have it so," Lurlie said, disdainfully, and letting her head sink back wearily into the soft embrace of the cushions of the chair. The golden head shone like a blaze of light in contrast to the dark green of the cushion whereon the head nestled.

"I see you do remember something of the past; you remember that I like to have my own way, and generally succeed in having it," Bertrand said, in his cool way. "But to my story. If I am wrong in any of the particulars, just correct me, please."

Lurlie answered only with a disdainful look.

"To begin. In the year 1852, a man known as Joseph Casper kept a little hotel called the Chicago House, in the town of Kankakee, State of Illinois. The said Joseph Casper—as a lawyer would say—had a daughter; a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of sixteen—a girl with an angel's face. What sort of a heart she possessed, my story will probably tell. One day in the year 1852, there came to the house of Joseph Casper a stranger from the South. He was a young lawyer from Little Rock, Arkansas. He had killed a scion of one of the first families of 'the Rock' in a duel, and had been forced to fly for his life. Chance brought him to the town of Kankakee; chance led him to the hotel of Joseph Casper, and thus threw him into the society of Casper's young and blooming daughter. This stranger was named Bertrand Tasnor. He was a young, dashing, good-looking fellow—or, at least, all the women said that he was. It was not wonderful that Lurlie—so Casper's daughter was called—should fall in love with the handsome stranger, or he with her. Two hearts of fire, a single spark ignited them, and the hot blaze of love sprung up. It was not long before the two came to an understanding. Tasnor was not bashful by nature, and Lurlie would have wooed him if he had not laid siege to her. So far, all was straight and clear. Bertrand loved Lurlie, Lurlie loved Bertrand. Now all that remains to do is to unite the two, and the story is finished. They were married, and lived happily ever afterward. But stop! the story I am telling had a different ending. There was an obstacle in Bertrand and Lurlie's path to happiness. Bertrand had a wealthy rival—an old German, a friend of Lurlie's father. Old Casper favored his suit, and as he was a surly and determined man by nature, the lovers knew full well that he would never consent to their marriage. There was but one course open—to fly together, and seek afar that bliss that was denied them at home.

"The elopement was cunningly planned and cleverly carried out. Bertrand paid his bill and left the house in the morning. That very night Lurlie fled and joined her lover. No one suspected that the two had gone together.

"Bertrand and Lurlie came to Chicago, and there they were married. For one single month alone they tasted of the cup of joy; then the honey lost its sweetness, little by little. The fire was too intense to burn with a steady flame. Bertrand, too, was really cold and heartless by nature. He soon tired of the warm caresses of the girl who had forsaken home, friends, all for him. You see I do not spare him. I am speaking truth. The girl, too; her nature was not one capable of feeling the pure and holy love that makes married life happy. The two were totally unsuited for each other. Their natures were too much alike for them ever to live together and be happy. It did not take them long to discover this. The wild dream of happiness soon came to an untimely end, and they faced stern reality.

"Bertrand, besides, did not prosper in the world. He had attempted to practice his profession in Chicago, but briefs were few and far between for the unknown lawyer. And Lurlie, the wife, instead of standing with him, shoulder to shoulder, like the Highlanders of old, and battling like a true woman against the adverse fortune that was crushing them so heavily to the earth, unnerved the spirits of Bertrand by unceasing regrets and unavailing complainings.

"At last, Bertrand grew to curse the very hour when he had first looked upon the face of the beautiful girl whose heart had more of the devil in it than the human. He was not slow, either, to tell Lurlie his thoughts. The hot, passionate love changed into deadly hate.

"Then a child was born—a baby girl. Bertrand felt no pride in his child. It was only another weight hung about his shoulders. Hard fortune was making him desperate.

"Some six months after the child was born, a terrible quarrel took place between the husband and wife. Bertrand spoke his mind freely. He told the beautiful angel that she had the heart of a devil, and that he wished that he had never seen her. Maddened at his words, Lurlie struck at him with a knife. The keen-edged weapon laid open his breast, but 'twas a mere flesh-wound, and not dangerous. Angered beyond measure—all the evil in his nature roused to action—Bertrand, with the butt of his revolver, struck the woman to his feet. It was a heavy blow, given with all the force of his powerful arm. There at his feet lay the woman whom he had once loved so well; the being that he had sworn to love, cherish and protect. The blood was streaming freely from a fearful gash on her head. The golden hair was stained a darker hue with crimson gore. Believing that he had killed her, Bertrand fled. He left his child to the mercy of the world. This man's heart was of ice; he cared for no one but himself. You see I do not attempt to make an angel out of him.

"Years passed on. Bertrand, battling with the world, heard nothing of the wife and child that he had deserted. He concluded that both were dead. Seventeen years after these events, Bertrand found himself again in Chicago. He was a ruined, desperate man. The world had gone ill with him. Three times he had won a fortune, three times he had lost it. Nothing seemed to prosper with him in the end. A curse was apparently upon his life. Whenever the cup of fortune was raised to his lips, some powerful stroke dashed it down again to earth. He thought that it was a judgment for the death of the girl that he had once loved so madly. Judge of his surprise, then, when accident revealed to him that she was living.

"She is now rich. Can she fail to aid the man that she once loved so dearly? Of course not—particularly, as it is very probable, unless she finds some means to stop the tongue of Bertrand, that he will talk!"

"And what will he say?" asked Lurlie, an ominous light shining in the large blue eyes.

"What will he say?" repeated Bertrand, as if in astonishment. "What do you think he will be likely to say?"

"I do not know, nor do I care," said Lurlie, contemptuously.

"Oh, you do not!" and Bertrand laughed as he spoke; but there was a hidden menace in his laughter. "I'll tell you what he will say. He will tell the world that Mrs. Captain Middough, formerly Miss Lurlie Casper, is the wife of Bertrand Tasnor."

"And how will that hurt me?"

"Do you think that your husband, the old captain, will like it when he hears that the charming young flower that he picked up in the delightful locality known as Wells street, is a married woman, and that, instead of being a girl of eighteen, she is a woman of thirty-four?"

"He will not believe you!" Lurlie cried, impetuously.

"I can easily prove to him that I speak the truth."

"Even if he does believe you, the fact will not change his love for me."

"Perhaps not; but when I exert the rights that the law gives me, and take you from him, it will be apt to make you uncomfortable if it does not affect him," Bertrand said, coolly.

"Take me from him?" cried Lurlie.

"Yes, I am your husband, am I not? We have not been divorced, even though we are living in Chicago. You should have looked out for that, Lurlie. You should have cut free from me before you tied yourself to him. You are very much married, Lurlie, now, having two husbands."

"You can not prove our marriage!"

"Yes I can. The minister is in Chicago: I saw him the other day. How would you like to figure in a police-court on a charge of bigamy?"

Lurlie was puzzled. She had had an idea that the lapse of years had annulled her first marriage, yet she was not sure.

"What do you demand of me?" she asked.

"What all the world wants—money."

"How much?"

"That depends upon circumstances. I suppose you wish all the secrets of the past to be kept still as secrets?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is difficult for me to fix upon a price for my silence. Of course I want all I can get. I have it! Allow me a yearly income; say, two thousand dollars per year. Divide it into monthly parts."

"How long will you give me to think over this?"

"Just five minutes," Bertrand answered, laconically.

"Then, without waiting for five minutes, I refuse," said Lurlie, rising, spiritedly.

Bertrand's brows contracted. He saw that he had over-shot the mark.

"You refuse?" he said.

"Yes, if you force me to answer now. If you will give me time to think it over, and I find that I am fully in your power, I will give you what you ask."

For a moment Bertrand was silent. He knew full well that he had no very strong hold upon Lurlie, and he thought it better not to push her to the wall.

"Well, I will give you time; say until this time to-morrow. Will that do?"

"Yes," Lurlie answered, and a peculiar light shone in her eyes as she spoke. Bertrand's keen eye noted the gleam. He guessed what was passing in her mind.

"She is thinking of some way to outwit me," he muttered to himself. "Thinking of some new blow to aim at me, but I bear a 'charmed life,' like Macbeth. I will put my wits against hers any day and will not fear for the result."

"Come to-morrow, at this same hour, and you shall have my answer," she said.

"Very well, be it so; but, Lurlie, I want some money now."

"How much?"

"Oh, but a trifle; fifty dollars or so."

"I have forty here in my wallet; will that do?"

"Yes," he answered.

Lurlie took out her pocket-book and counted the bills into his hand.

As she did so, her fingers touched his; he seized the little hand and held it, lightly, within his own broad palm.

"To think, Lurlie," he said, "that this little white hand could deal such fearful blows—that this soft palm could grasp a dagger and drive it to a man's heart! Do you know, Lurlie, that I bear on my breast to this day the scar caused by the wound that you gave me?"

"And if you will part the curls on my head you will find there the terrible scar where you struck me with your revolver," she said.

"Marks of affection from the husband to the wife," he cried, with a laugh.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BERTRAND MEETS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

"AND now I suppose our interview is ended, is it not?"

demanding Lurlie.

"Yes, but there is one question more that I should like to ask. Our child, Lurlie, what ever became of it?"

"I do not know," said Lurlie, sadly.

"You do not know?" said Bertrand, in astonishment.

"No. I was forced to abandon it. You left me here in Chicago, without money, without friends. What could I do with a helpless infant?" she asked, bitterly.

"You might have taken it home to your father."

"Yes, and have every one believe that it was the child of shame. No, that I could not bear. I found what I thought would be a home for my infant. In that home I left it. I said that I abandoned it, but I did not, for I intended some day to return and claim my child again."

"And why did you not?"

"I did, but I could find no trace of the woman in whose care I left my babe. She had left Chicago and taken my infant with her. You think that I am cold and heartless, Bertrand; perhaps I am; but, as there is a heaven above, I loved my child with all a mother's love. Many a night have I wept myself to sleep, thinking and mourning for my lost baby."

"And all clue to the child then is lost!" Bertrand said, musingly.

"Yes," Lurlie answered, sadly.

"If she were living she would now be a girl of sixteen."

"Yes, but I do not think that she is living. Something tells me that she is dead."

"What was the name of the woman with whom you left the child?" Bertrand asked.

"Cavendish; she was an English woman. Do you not remember? She had apartments right above the ones that we occupied."

"Oh, I do remember," said Bertrand, after a pause. "Do you know I have a strange curiosity to discover whether our child is living or dead?"

"Search is useless. If I, urged onward by a mother's love, have failed, it is not likely that you will succeed."

"Perhaps not; yet I shall try. I should remember the face of the woman at once. I've a wonderful memory for faces, although a very bad one for names."

Bertrand rose to depart.

"To-morrow you will come again?" she asked.

"Yes, to receive your answer; to decide whether it is to be peace or war between us. If you are wise, Lurlie, you will not make a foe of me."

A scornful smile appeared around the corners of the girl's mouth as he spoke.

Bertrand passed from the room.

Leaving Lurlie to her reflections, which were far from being pleasant, we will follow Bertrand.

As he passed from the parlor into the entryway, he heard the rustle of a woman's dress.

"By Jove!" he cried to himself, "that sounds as if some one had been listening to our conversation. If the secret is in possession of any one else, it won't be worth much to me."

Then, from the darkness of the other end of the entry, a woman came toward him.

As she came into the glare of the gaslight, Bertrand could not repress a start.

The quick eye of the woman noticed the movement, and, with her fingers on her lips, motioned silence.

Bertrand was amazed. He had recognized an old acquaintance!

"Follow me," said the girl, cautiously.

Without a word, Bertrand followed.

The girl led the way into a small room at the end of the hall; then, after they had entered, she carefully closed the door.

"Now we can speak freely."

"Aimee, is it possible that it is you?" exclaimed Bertrand, in wonder.

"Yes," replied the waiting-maid, for it was Aimee who had appeared so mysteriously.

"What are you doing in this house?"

"I am Mrs. Middough's maid," said the girl, with mock humbleness.

"You are?"

"Yes. Quite a change isn't it from the time when my father kept the wine-store on the the west side, and you used to come there—used to drink my father's wine and make love to my father's daughter?"

"What has caused such a change in your circumstances?"

"My father died suddenly. I was poor. I could not

carry on his business. I was forced to do something or starve. I am happy now."

"And yet you are a servant."

"We are all servants in this world; if not to one another, then to something else. You are a servant now, Monsieur Bertrand, and poverty is a hard master," said the girl.

"Oh, you have overheard—"

"All that passed between you and my mistress, yes. I am very curious," said the girl, with a light laugh.

"Then you know the hold I have upon this woman?"

"Which isn't any hold at all, unless she is frightened into thinking that you have one."

"You're a shrewd girl, Aimee! you reason sagely." Bertrand knew full well that she spoke the truth.

"Yes, but suppose that I tell you something by which you may be able to bow her to your will?" said the girl, a wicked look in her dark eyes.

"You know something then that I do not?"

"Yes, something that no one else knows except myself."

"Concerning this woman who was once my wife?"

"Yes."

"And will you tell it to me?" asked Bertrand, eagerly.

"Yes, if you'll promise to give me a share of what you may be able to gain by the use of the knowledge that I am about to impart to you."

"I agree to that; it is a bargain," said Bertrand, quickly.

"Well, then, Mrs. Middough is in love with some one, and that some one is not her husband."

Bertrand's keen eyes sparkled at the news.

"Are you sure of this?" he asked.

"Yes, quite sure," answered the girl, confidently. "I am not blind. I can see well enough."

"And who is the man?"

"A gentleman, named Edmund Kelford; he lives only a few doors from here. This girl, or woman rather, loves him with her whole soul, and you can probably guess how she can love."

"And does he love her?"

"Not yet. I do not think that he even suspects that she cares any thing for him. He is very much in love with a sewing-girl who works in a shop on Clark street."

"Does Lurlie know that she has a rival?"

"Yes; she questioned me until she found out all the particulars of the affair. Then, the other night, she took the trouble to go to Clark street to see the girl."

"By Jove!" cried Bertrand, suddenly. "I remember now, I saw her there, and you, I suppose, were the other female that was with her."

"Yes."

"I was puzzled at the time to account for her presence in such a locality and at such an hour. It was to see this girl, then, her rival, that she took all this trouble?"

"Yes."

For a few moments Bertrand remained silent, evidently in deep thought.

"I have it," he said, at length. "We must encourage this affair. Lurlie must be made to commit herself in some way, then she will be utterly in our power. I have a curiosity to see this girl who can rival this beautiful tiger. Is she pretty?"

"I do not think so," replied the girl, with a shrug of her shoulders; "but, this Mr. Kelford declares that she is the loveliest woman in all the world."

"A very natural thing for a lover to say; they all say it, even though the object of their adoration be as ugly as sin is supposed to be," Bertrand said, with a sneer.

"If you would like to see her, I can direct you."

"There is no need of that. I remember the locality well enough. I will see the girl; but it is necessary for the success of our plans that Lurlie shall succeed in winning the love of this young man. If I can, I will aid her in crushing her rival; but out of that triumph will come the means that shall in the end lead to her downfall—after we have drawn from her all the money we need."

"We are allies, then?"

"Yes; keep a good watch upon all that passes within the house. We have the game in our hands if we only play our cards rightly."

And so having made the compact, Bertrand departed.

"My skies are brightening!" he cried, exultantly, as he strode along the street. "By the aid of this girl I shall be able to keep a constant watch upon Lurlie; I shall know all that passes within the house. Fate seems to work for me now rather than against me. Just as I felt that the rope

which bound this woman to me was slipping out of my hands, then another and a stronger one is placed within my palm. So, Lurlie already tires of the old man, who bought her with his money. The chains are silken ones, perhaps; still they are chains, nevertheless. Now, if this man, Kelford, will but fall in love with her, my vengeance would be satisfied. That love will be the means by which I will work her ruin. The old captain must know that his young and dainty wife already tires of the bonds of wedlock.

"First, to see this girl, Lurlie's rival; she must be lovely indeed to rival this beautiful demon."

Bertrand proceeded straight to the little shop in Clark street. The bells were just striking nine as he reached it.

As he stood before the shop, Pearl came out; her work finished, she was proceeding homeward.

As she passed by Bertrand, he had a full view of her face, and a wonderful effect that face had upon him. For a moment he reeled like a drunken man. It seemed as if he had been stricken by some heavy blow.

"Merciful powers!" he gasped. "Can it be possible? It can not be that I am dreaming!" Then he passed his hand mechanically across his brows. "Can it be that fate is going to give me such a vengeance as this will be, if my guess proves true? It will be terrible, and amply repay me for all the past. I must not lose sight of this girl. I must follow her; find out all I can about her."

And with this resolution Bertrand followed in the footsteps of the girl.

At the corner of the street Pearl was joined by Kelford, who was waiting for her as usual. Then they proceeded onward. Bertrand followed at a safe distance.

"I wonder if this is the man that Lurlie has given her heart to?" he muttered, as he followed stealthily in the rear of the young couple.

They proceeded onward arm in arm, little thinking that they were so closely followed.

Kelford saw Pearl to the door of her house, then bade her good-night and retraced his steps homeward.

Pearl was a riddle to the young man. She confessed frankly that she liked him, but would never own that that liking was love or would ever become love. Kelford felt that he was almost hoping against hope.

Bertrand watched the young couple separate, the girl enter the house and the young man proceed down the street. He had concealed himself in a doorway opposite.

"I am sure that it is she!" he muttered, as he emerged from the gloom of the doorway, "but I must be certain that I am right before I strike the blow. Oh, it will be a terrible vengeance!" and he ground his teeth together fiercely as he spoke. "I hate this woman who was once my wife. She was the ruin of my life, made me what I am, a felon and an outcast, but this vengeance will pay for all."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PRICE OF A LIFE IN CHICAGO.

In a little dingy office just across the way on Randolph street from the court-house, sat an elderly, gray-haired man. His features were thin and sharp. Cunning was in the little gray eyes, and trickery played in the lines of his thin-lipped mouth.

This was the celebrated criminal lawyer, Grover Chicks. A man of wide reputation; renowned for keen legal tricks, and notorious from the number of divorce suits that he had successfully carried through.

A knock at the door of his office drew the lawyer's attention from the pile of musty-looking papers that he was perusing.

"Come in," he said.

A lady entered. She was heavily veiled and evidently intended that her features should be concealed as much as possible.

The lawyer was not at all astonished at the precaution shown. He had had too many queer customers in his dingy little office to wonder at the appearance of any of his clients.

"Lawyer Chicks?" said the lady.

"Yes," replied that individual; "pray be seated," and as he spoke he rose from the table and handed his visitor a

chair. Politeness was Chicks' great forte.

"I wish to see you on a little matter of business," said the lady, in a tone that betrayed considerable hesitation.

"Certainly, ma'am," said the lawyer, blandly, and then he murmured to himself, "another divorce case, I'll bet."

From the tone of the lady's voice and by her slender figure, the lawyer judged that his client was a young woman.

"Pray be seated, ma'am," said the lawyer, again offering the chair, which the lady this time accepted.

"What I wish to know is, suppose that a husband should leave his wife here in Chicago, go away and remain absent for fifteen or sixteen years, would—" and the lady paused.

"I know what you wish to say, my dear madam," cried Chicks, who understood the case in an instant, or at least thought he did. "You wish to know if there would be legal grounds for a divorce. Certainly, ma'am; put the case in my hands and I'll insure you victory. No doubt about getting a divorce upon any such grounds as that." Then Chicks leaned back and looked sagacious.

"Yes, but you do not exactly understand what I wish to learn," said the veiled lady, quietly. "As I have said: suppose that the husband remains absent for sixteen years, and during all that time the wife never hears from him in any way whatsoever; and during that time she marries again. Then the first husband comes back and claims his wife. Has he a legal claim upon the woman?"

"None in the world!" cried Chicks; "the mere fact of his remaining away for that length of time constitutes a divorce."

"Then, if she did not wish to go with him, the law gives him no power to force her to comply?"

"None at all."

"And the second marriage is strictly legal?"

"Of course."

The lady drew a long breath as though a weight had been lifted off her mind.

She rose to depart.

"How much?" she said, taking out a pocket-book well-filled with bills.

"Five dollars, ma'am," and then, the very moment after he had spoken, Chicks was sorry that he hadn't said ten.

The lady gave the lawyer the money, and, without a word, departed.

"That's an easily earned five dollars!" chuckled the lawyer, sitting down again to his papers.

The lady descended the stairs.

In her plain garb and with the thick veil drawn down closely over her features, few would have guessed her to be the dashing Mrs. Middough.

"I am safe, then," she muttered, as she emerged upon the sidewalk; "but no; not safe, for Bertrand can tell the story of my life to my husband. I am sure that it will not change his love for me, yet for him to possess the knowledge will be a thorn in my side. Bertrand must die. Once already since his return have I tried to strike him; the blow failed to accomplish my purpose; my second stroke shall be more certain. I'll go to my father and ask his aid. This man will come to see me to-night, to receive my answer. When he leaves me he must be waited for. He must never see the morning's light a living man."

And with these dark thoughts surging through her brain, Lurlie hurried onward.

She soon reached her former home in Wells street.

Entering, she found her father behind the bar as usual.

"Why, Lurlie, gal," he cried, in astonishment, "come to see the old man?"

"Yes, father, I want your assistance," she said.

There was no one besides her father in the saloon, so she could speak freely.

"You do? well, spit it out; what kin I do for you?"

"You remember the man that came to this house just before I married the captain? The stranger that I told you I had met long years ago?"

"Yes, 'pears to me I do," said old Casper, reflectively.

"The man that you was afeard of; the fellow with long black hair and black eyes?"

"Yes, he is the one that I mean."

"Has he run across you ag'in?"

"Yes, and he threatens to tell my husband all about my past life if I do not pay him to keep silent."

"I'd pay him with a good knife-dig in the heart," said Casper, savagely.

"Father, between you and me deception is useless. I hate this man, and I wish him dead," said Lurlie, earnestly.

"But what difference does it make to you if this poor shoat does speak?" Casper asked.

"Father, this man is my husband."

"Your husband?" cried Casper, in amazement.

"Yes, I was married to him here in Chicago years ago. I thought him dead, but he is living to torment me," Lurlie said, angrily.

"Why, then you've got two husbands!" cried Casper, astonished.

"Yes, but the first marriage is void. This man holds two threats over my head. The first one was that he would claim me as his wife and force me to go with him. But I have consulted a lawyer and I find that he can not do so. His second threat was that he would see my husband and tell him all that he knows in relation to my past life. True, I do not think that it would change my husband's love at all, but it is not pleasant to have any one—much less the captain—know aught of that life which should be buried from the world forever."

"The only way then to keep him quiet is to put him where he can't talk," said the old man, grimly.

"You are right, father, that is the only way," replied Lurlie, firmly.

"Can he be got at easily?" said Casper, thoughtfully.

"Yes, he is coming to see me to-night at my house on Michigan avenue. He will come between seven and nine o'clock."

"And if any one should 'lay' for him about that time, they wouldn't be apt to miss him?"

"No."

"All right; I'll fix it," said the old man, with an air of satisfaction. "But, Lurlie, gal, it will cost money."

"I care not what it costs, so that I am free from his presence," cried Lurlie, fiercely.

"You don't love him much, now, do you?" said the old man, with a chuckle.

"Love him!" and Lurlie's lips curled in scorn; "hate is too weak a word to express the loathing that I bear for him. All Chicago is not large enough to hold this man and me. One of us must die."

"All right; I'll fix him," said the old man; "he's a stranger and will never be missed. I know a couple of fellows that I think will do the job up prime; they've just come from California. I reckon that they ain't over and above flush, so they'll probably be reasonable."

"No matter what the cost is, so that it insures his death." There was no hesitation visible in Lurlie's voice.

"I'll fix it; leave it all to me, 'cos you don't want to be mixed up in the affair at all. I'll see the boys, and arrange the job. He'll leave the house between seven and nine, eh?"

"Yes."

And so the death of Bertrand Tasnor was planned.

Lurlie returned to her own splendid home on the lake shore. Yet what was all the luxury by which she was surrounded to her while the demon of fear was in her heart.

"To-night will free me from this man," she thought.

"To-morrow I can breathe again, freely. Bertrand will be removed from my path, and then this girl, Pearl, must follow. Once she is removed, I will find some way to break the gilded chains that bind me to this old man, and then to win the love of Edmund Kelford."

After Lurlie's departure, old Casper, leaving the house in charge of a shock-headed boy, his assistant since Rick had left—for that worthy had suddenly disappeared one morning, without even taking the trouble to say good-by—proceeded down the street.

He halted at a dingy saloon, a few doors from his own.

Over the door of the saloon was the sign, MILWAUKEE HOUSE.

Casper entered.

"Is Dick Goff about?" he asked.

"He's inside," said the barkeeper, pointing to a door to the right of the bar.

Casper opened the door and entered the room.

Two men were in the apartment, busily engaged at a game of cards.

The two were rough-looking fellows, with small, evil eyes, and bull-dog faces.

"Hello, old man, what's up?" asked the larger of the two, who apparently knew Casper well.

"A little job," replied Casper. "Do you want to make some money?"

"You bet!" said the rough, who was the notorious Dick Goff in person—a man well known to the Chicago police, as

well as to the prison officials at Joliet.

Casper sat down and explained to the two what he wished them to do.

After he had finished, Dick cogitated for a moment.

"It must be done to-night!"

"Yes," Casper answered.

"How much tin?"

"What do you want?"

"He's to be laid out stiff!"

"Yes."

"Five hundred."

"Give you a hundred apiece."

"Too little."

"Take or leave it," said Casper, rising.

"Hold on; throw in the beer?"

"Yes."

"It's a bargain."

That night, at seven o'clock, two men lounged carelessly up Eighteenth street to Michigan avenue. They walked down the avenue till they halted in front of the Middough mansion.

The night-birds were waiting for their prey.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SNARING A HEART.

KELFORD sat in the parlor of the Middough mansion. He had called after supper in quest of Wirt, but that gentleman had not returned home since dinner. In obedience to Mrs. Middough's urgent request, Kelford had entered the house. In fact, he needed but little urging for a strange fascination was exercised over his nature by the wife of the old captain. In vain he struggled against it, and strove to cast off the subtle influence that was weaving its dangerous mesh around his heart.

Vainly he said to himself: "This woman is the wife of another; why should I think of her?" and yet he did think of her.

And at the same time he loved Pearl Oudlipp with all the ardor of a man's first love. Such is the inconsistency of poor, weak human nature.

The man felt that he was in peril every minute he spent in the presence of golden-haired, blue-eyed Lurlie; and yet he did not avoid that peril, but rather courted it.

He was beginning to think that the love he felt for Pearl was but a hopeless, aimless passion; that he would never win her, and that it would be better for him to crush the passion from his heart. A subtle demon whispered in his ear, and urged him to forget the pure and holy love he felt for the pure girl in the smiles of elegant Lurlie. The same instinct was dominant in his nature that urges the hopeless man to seek forgetfulness in the wine-cup.

And so he sat in the Middough parlor, face to face with the dangerous siren, who had lured the old captain to make her his wife.

Lurlie's joy was plainly evident in her face. The fierce passion that she called love was raging in her heart. For Kelford's sake—to win his love—she would have dared the fires below.

To have looked in the face of Lurlie, none would have guessed the evil passions that swayed her heart.

"Where is the captain?" asked Kelford.

"He has gone to Milwaukee on business," replied Lurlie.

"I do not expect him home for three days."

"You must miss him greatly," Kelford said.

"No," Lurlie answered, truthfully.

"You do not?" Kelford asked, in amazement.

"No."

"That is strange."

"You would not think so if you knew the truth," Lurlie said. "I do not know why I should say this openly to you, for I suppose I ought not to speak of it, and I am sure that I would not say it to any one but you. I know you to be a gentleman, Mr. Kelford, and I am sure that you will not betray the confidence that I repose in you."

"You may rest assured of that," said Kelford, quickly.

The snare was closing, slowly but surely, around the heart of the young man.

A married woman should have but one confidant; and that confidant her husband.

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Lurlie, looking the

young man full in the face with the glorious eyes so full of subtle witchery.

Kelford was dazzled as he looked upon the eyes; dazzled as he would have been had he gazed upon the sun at noon-day.

"You can hardly guess how much I wish for some one to whom I can speak freely and without reserve," she said, with a mournful accent.

"Your husband," suggested Kelford.

"How can he, a man of *his* years, have aught in common with a girl like me? We are matched but not mated. I thought that I loved him, but I was wrong. It is the affection of a daughter toward a father, not the love that a wife should bear her husband."

"But, you have discovered this truth too late," said Kelford, frankly. "You can not now repair the error."

"You forget that we live in Chicago," said Lurlie, archly; "Chicago is famed for divorces."

Kelford laughed at the words.

"I'm afraid that our good city is much abused by the outside barbarians."

"But there is a good deal of truth in my words."

"I do not deny it," replied Kelford; "but how long is it since you discovered that the love you bore your husband was not the one that should fill your breast?"

"I can hardly answer that question," said Lurlie, slowly, and dropping her eyes from Kelford's face to the carpet.

"Not answer it?" said Kelford, in amazement; "is it possible that you do not know?"

"Yes, I know, and yet I can hardly answer," and Lurlie cast a swift glance under the long, golden eyelashes at the face of the young man, and then again her eyes sought the carpet.

Kelford was perplexed. He had noted the glance, swift as it was; but, its meaning he feared to guess at, even in the secret of his own thoughts.

"That is odd," said Kelford, slowly; "I can hardly understand how that can be."

"Perhaps I could tell some one else, but I can not tell you," said Lurlie, softly.

The hot blood surged up into Kelford's face.

The truth flashed upon him, and yet he could hardly believe it. Bewildered, he asked himself if this golden-haired beauty could be in love with him.

"You can not tell *me*?" he said, mechanically.

"No, for then you would guess a secret that is better for both of us you should not know. I can tell you a little of it though, and I will. I know that I do not love my husband, because, since my marriage, I have met one that I *do* love."

"Is it possible?" Kelford was in a maze. Two passions in his heart were struggling for mastery; first, the love he bore to Pearl—hopeless passion though it was—second, the wild infatuation that the spells of the golden-haired beauty had caused.

"Yes, I frankly tell you the truth; tell you, whom I ought not to tell. But, I have spoken the words and I will not recall them."

"I pledge you my honor that I will not repeat them," said Kelford, earnestly.

"I am not afraid of that," replied Lurlie, quickly. "I know that I can trust to your honor. Oh, Mr. Kelford, I do not believe you can guess how bitter it is for a woman to discover that she is bound for life to a man that she can not love as she should love him."

"We can not always have things to our liking in this life. There's many a love in the world that never meets its reward." Kelford spoke feelingly, and as the words passed from his lips, before his eyes rose the image of Pearl Cudlipp, the pale face wherein was enshrined the large eyes so full of mournful sweetness. Then, for a moment, the spells of the siren were powerless, the silken meshes that passion had spun around his heart were burst like cobwebs.

Lurlie guessed from his face what was passing within his mind. She saw that her influence was waning. The angry spirit of a demon was in her heart, but no traces of it appeared in her face.

"And that, I fear, will be the fate of the passion that fills my heart," she said, slowly and mournfully. "I know that it is sinful for me to even think of it, but I can not help it; I am only a poor, weak woman, not a giant in will. I have striven—oh! striven so hard to conquer this passion—to drive it from my heart and forget the man whose noble nature made me love him, despite myself."

And as she spoke so earnestly and so piteously, she looked Kelford full in the face. The eyes fascinated him as the eyes of the serpent fascinate the bird.

Again he felt that he was in danger. Something whispered him to fly from this woman, who was so weak in her agony and yet so strong in her helplessness. But, the impulse was not strong enough to break the meshes that her passionate eyes had again woven around his heart.

"This is a terrible situation for you," Kelford said, earnestly.

"Is it not, and yet I must bear it!" she cried, with a piteous look.

"I do not know how to advise you," the young man said, after a pause.

"And I can not tell you. My head is in a maze whenever I think of it."

"Why not avoid his presence?" suggested Kelford, slowly.

"And so lose the little ray of sunlight that fate permits to beam upon my life-path?" she cried, impatiently.

"But, if that sunlight is destined to be succeeded by a still darker gloom—"

"Take away the light of his presence and I am in the gloom and darkness of the tomb. Seeing him is the only comfort that I have."

"And do you see him often?" Kelford asked, and then the moment after felt sorry that he had put the question.

"Not half so often as I could wish," she replied, quickly.

"I have never seen him but once alone, and the joy that that meeting gave me tells me full well how happy I would be if fate should ever give me to him, forever and forever."

Kelford felt as if he was under the influence of some terrible dream as the passionate words came from Lurlie's red lips.

"You will think I am foolish, I know, when I tell you that I sit at the window yonder, for hours together, only to catch sight of him as he passes along the street. And the days I do not see him, I go up-stairs to my rooms, lock myself in, and in scalding, bitter tears strive to forget my misery."

"Does he know that you love him?" Kelford asked, slowly. He felt that some irresistible power was drawing him quietly, but surely, to some dreadful gulf. He guessed who the man was that this beautiful woman loved with such a fierce and guilty passion. He knew that he ought not to be eager to learn the truth, and yet he could not resist the wish to do so.

"How can he know that I love him, unless he reads the truth in my eyes?" Lurlie asked. "I am not a young, unmarried girl; if I were, then I might exert the powers that Nature has given me to make him love me; but, as it is, I can not. I must be secret and be silent; must crush the love that is burning in my heart, and thus suffer untold misery."

"I am sorry that I can not aid you."

"But you can," said Lurlie, quickly.

"Indeed, in what way? Let me know, and I shall be only too glad to oblige you." Kelford spoke earnestly.

"This man that I love thinks himself in love with another woman. She does not return his passion, therefore, I know that he can not really love her; that it is only an infatuation on his part, for if he did love her, really and truly, she could not help loving him in return, so noble is his nature. I can not bear the thought that any other woman should win him. I am young yet; my husband is an old man. In the course of nature a few years will set me free; then, if *he* is free I can win him. I wish that you would see him, tell him that I love him; that will relieve my heart. Will you do this?" Full of pleading was the tone in which Lurlie spoke.

Kelford was puzzled. He thought he had guessed Lurlie's secret, and yet her speech told him that his guess was wrong.

"I will do as you wish. Where can I see this man?" he asked.

"Here, to-morrow night at this same hour," she replied.

"Here!" Kelford said, in astonishment.

"Yes, here," repeated Lurlie; "I will invite him here on some pretext; he will not guess why I wish to see him."

"And you are sure that he will come?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, I will come, too."

A knock at the door interrupted the conversation.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

In obedience to Lurlie's summons, a servant entered the room.

"I beg pardon, ma'am, but a gentleman wishes to see you."

"To see me?" said Lurlie, with affected surprise, for she knew full well *who* the visitor was, and why he came.

"Yes, ma'am. He wished to see you personally, so he said," replied the servant.

"Very well; show him into the library and tell him that I will see him in a moment."

"Yes, ma'am," said the servant, and then he departed to bear the message.

"You will excuse me for a few minutes," Lurlie asked, smiling sweetly upon the young man.

"Yes, but I must wish you good-evening," said Kelford, rising. His head already was in a flame; he did not dare to risk a second interview now with the golden-haired siren.

"Must you go?" There was a world of regret in the tone of Lurlie's voice as she put the simple question.

"Yes," replied Kelford, slowly. In Lurlie's face and voice he read a truth which gave him both pain and pleasure. His better nature contended with the wild infatuation that the spells of the blue-eyed siren had cast about his heart.

"I am so sorry; but you will come again?" she asked, quickly and eagerly.

"Yes, to-morrow night."

"The hours will be very long ones till to-morrow night comes," Lurlie said, sadly.

"I hope not," Kelford replied. He hardly dared to trust himself to speak. All the good within his nature was striving against the evil fascination exercised over him by this bright-eyed spirit.

"I know that they will be long hours and sad ones, too, until I look again upon your face!" Lurlie cried, impulsively.

"But, good-night; I will not detain you longer. I see that you wish to leave me."

"Lurlie!" exclaimed Kelford, reproachfully.

"That is right, call me Lurlie!" she cried. "It is the first time that you have ever done so. I hope, though, that it will not be the last. But, good-by," and she extended her hand as she spoke.

Kelford took the little white hand within his own. The warm pressure tingled through every vein within his body. That single grasp made him Lurlie's slave.

A few words more of aimless import, and Kelford left the house.

As the cool night-air struck upon his fevered brow, he vainly asked himself if he had not been in the mazes of a dream; if the scene, in which he had played so prominent a part, was in truth reality.

As Kelford proceeded up the avenue toward his own house, two men came from the darkness of an alley-way and followed him cautiously. They had proceeded but a few steps only, when a third, who had apparently been concealed in a doorway a little further down the street, overtook the other two.

"Hold on," said the third man, addressing the two who were following Kelford; "that ain't the man."

"No?" growled one of the two addressed, in a tone which showed his deep disgust.

"No; the one you want was the fellow that just went into the house."

"What! that tall fellow?"

"Yes."

"He's a w'opper, he is; he'll make a tough old fight if we give him the chance."

"Jump on him, suddenly," suggested the third stranger.

"You bet, as we used to say in Frisco," said the other, with a grin.

Then all three returned to their former stations, and apparently the street was again deserted. No one would have guessed that the darkness of the night hid three men on murder intent.

Had it not been for the presence of old Casper, who was the man who had stopped the two roughs from following in the footsteps of Kelford, Bertrand Tasnor's good star would have saved him from the night attack, and the young man would have been the victim.

Kelford went straight to his house, but, restless and un-

nerved, he could not remain there. In search of something to distract his mind and quell the fire raging so wildly in his veins, he jumped into a car and rode down-town. There he met a party of his friends, and for the first time in his life joined them in a "time."

Kelford that night went home flushed with champagne. Midnight was over, and the clocks were striking two when he retired to rest.

And Pearl that night? When she came from the little shop, her place of toil, she found no Edmund Kelford waiting for her.

It was the first night that he had ever missed escorting her home since they had become acquainted.

The way home had never seemed so long and lonesome to Pearl as it did that night.

Her heart was heavy with fear; fear for the man whom she had repeatedly said that she did not love. Her thoughts suggested that Kelford was ill. She did not think even for a single instant that any thing but sickness could keep him from the test that he had assigned to himself.

Pearl's pillow that night was damp with tears. The young girl cried herself to sleep; cried, she knew not why, except that she felt all alone in the world; yet, even amid her tears she would not own, even to herself, that she loved Edmund Kelford.

Lurlie, after Kelford's departure, proceeded up-stairs to the library where she had ordered her visitor to be shown.

She knew, of course, who that visitor was, and was nerv-ing herself to meet him. She knew the scene would be a stormy one. A man like Bertrand Tasnor was not to be defied without a struggle. She knew that the struggle was at hand, and she was prepared for it.

She opened the door of the library and entered.

Within the room, cosily, in the arms of a huge-cushioned chair, sat Bertrand Tasnor.

Bertrand looked at Lurlie searchingly as she entered, seeking to read in her face the determination that she had arrived at. But, the face of Lurlie was as a sealed book, even to the keen eyes of the ex-road-agent.

"I have come, you see, as per appointment," he said, opening the conversation.

"Yes, I see," Lurlie replied, shortly.

Bertrand frowned. Neither the words nor the tone pleased him. He foresaw that all was not smooth sailing ahead.

"Well, have you thought over my words?" he asked, slowly.

"Yes," answered Lurlie, quietly.

"And have you made up your mind as to what course you will pursue?"

"I have."

Again Bertrand frowned. The coolness and quiet of Lurlie boded danger to him.

"And what do you intend to do?" Bertrand put the question, but felt sure what the answer would be before Lurlie opened her lips to reply.

"Refuse all your demands?"

"Refuse!" exclaimed Bertrand, and an ominous light gleamed in his dark eyes.

"Yes, refuse," said Lurlie, coldly, quietly, but firmly.

"Do you know what you are doing?" cried Bertrand, with a lowering look.

"Yes, I am fully aware of what I am doing," she replied, without heeding his frowns.

"You are mad!" Bertrand cried.

"No, I am not; but I have been mad, to seem, even for an instant, to yield to your threats," Lurlie replied, spirit-edly.

"You defy me then?" said Bertrand, rising, and the angry fire gleamed in his eyes.

Lurlie, though, faced him undaunted.

"Yes, I defy you. Do your worst, still I defy you!"

"Good!" cried Bertrand, bitterly. "To-morrow, then, all Chicago shall know that the fair young bride that old Captain Middough picked out of the slums of Wells street is the cast-off wife of Bertrand Tasnor, the duelist—the Confederate captain—the western outlaw."

"And what care I?" cried Lurlie, defiantly. "I have plenty of money. The crime must, indeed, be great in this world that a golden mask will not hide it, if crime or disgrace there be in ever having borne your detested name."

"But all your gold will not save you from me!" exclaimed Bertrand, with a threatening gesture. "To-morrow I will go before the proper authorities—show the proof that you

are my legal wife, and evoke the power of the law to force you to go with me. I'll take you from all this splendor, and from the arms of the old dotard whose money has bought your charms. Far from here, I'll make you repent in bitter tears the hour when you dared to defy my power. That I'll do, or I'll do worse—I'll send you to State's Prison!"

Lurlie laughed scornfully as his words fell upon her ears.

"You can not frighten me, Bertrand Tasnor," she said, proudly. "I know full well that you have no legal claim to me. I have sought the assistance and counsel of a lawyer, and he has told me that, by your desertion of me, our marriage was rendered null and void, years ago."

A bitter oath rose to Bertrand's lips; but, with an effort, he kept it back. He knew that Lurlie spoke the truth. His first blow had failed.

"Enough; I will not deny the truth; I know that, legally, I have no claim to you," he said; "you have parried my first blow. Now for the second."

"And that is?"

"I shall seek your husband; tell him all the facts relating to your past life—your marriage with me—your desertion of your child. It may anger the old captain when he discovers that his blooming child wife is the grass widow of a so-called desperate character, and the mother of a child. I shall also publish these facts to the world."

"And again I defy you!" Lurlie cried. "My husband is in Milwaukee. I will hasten to him at once; tell him frankly the history of my life; confess the deception I have practiced upon him by allowing him to think that I was a young, unmarried girl. I shall plead in excuse my love for him; tell him that I felt that I could never be happy in this world unless I became his wife. My tears will flow freely, and I shall offer to make all the atonement in my power, and that I can only do in one way—by leaving him. Then I will throw myself at his feet, and implore him to forgive me before I go away from him forever. Can you doubt what the result will be?" asked Lurlie, triumphantly.

"No, not for a single moment," replied Bertrand, angrily. "I know your power. The old fool will take you to his heart; tell you to forget, as he will forgive, all the past; call me an interna. scoundrel, and you a dear suffering angel. There is no fool like an old one in love."

"And you see your second blow will fall. Bertrand Tasnor, I have counted well the cost of defying you. Did I not think that I could do it successfully, I would not try to cope with you, but would yield to your demands. I am sure that you can not do me harm."

"I have yet another blow in store for you, Lurlie," said Bertrand, menacingly.

"Indeed!" and Lurlie looked the scorn she felt. "Is it as potent as the other two?"

"I think so, and you will think so, too, when you hear what it is," said Bertrand, coolly. "It comes in the shape of your child."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LURLIE'S CHILD.

FOR a moment Lurlie looked into the pitiless face of the man who was glowering upon her, and then, with a low moan of anguish she sunk into a chair by which she stood.

A look of fierce exultation swept over Bertrand's features as he beheld her stern will give way.

"Aha!" he cried, in triumph; "I have found a way at last to tame your haughty spirit. The third blow is more powerful than the others, is it not, Lurlie?"

The woman did not reply to the taunting question, but buried her face in her hands in anguish.

"Now then, will you be reasonable, and yield to my demands?" he asked.

"Oh, my poor baby!" she moaned.

"She has grown to womanhood—a beautiful girl, but though she is beautiful, she does not resemble you in the least nor me, either, for that matter. She is a strange compound of both of us in looks, but as report speaks of her as an angel, it is very clear that she does not resemble either of us in disposition," Bertrand said, sarcastically.

"Oh, how I have longed to see my child!" Lurlie said, feebly. "Many a night have I lain awake in the long, still hours, wondering what her fate had been—wondering if my child had been doomed to pass her young days in the self-same misery that had clouded all my early life."

"She has been happy enough," replied Bertrand, carelessly. "She does not carry in her bosom the heart of fire that burns in yours. Her life has been one of toil, but in that toil she has been happy."

"You have seen her?" Lurlie questioned, with an eager look into Bertrand's face.

"Yes, and found out all the particulars of her life."

"You will tell me where she is, so that I can see her, that I may imprint upon her innocent forehead a mother's kiss?" Lurlie's voice was full of emotion as she spoke.

"No," replied Bertrand, coldly.

"You will not tell me where she is, so that I can once more look upon her face?"

"No."

"And why not?" The angry blood swelled in Lurlie's veins as she spoke.

"Because I will not. The secret that I possess of your child's whereabouts is the only hold I have upon you. Once in possession of that secret, you would defy me as you have already tried to do."

"Bertrand, I implore you, by all that is good and holy in this world, do not keep a mother from her child! The love I bear to my girl is the only pure passion that has ever filled my heart. I know that I am utterly, thoroughly bad, with the single exception of that one love. Give me, then, some chance to save my soul from eternal perdition. My child may save me. For her sake I may become a better woman. Oh, Bertrand, your heart can not be all stone! Can you listen to my prayers—the prayers of a mother—and not grant my request?"

Wildly Lurlie extended her hand in supplication toward Bertrand, and the big tears, welling slowly from the passionate eyes, trickled down her white cheeks.

Bertrand's face wore a demon smile as he looked upon the supplicating woman.

"Lurlie, if I knew that your soul was sinking to the fires below, and the presence of your child could save that soul, you should not see her if I had the power to keep her from you!" Bitter and pitiless came the words from his lips.

"Why are you so merciless?" she asked, gazing, as she spoke, with straining eyes, upon his face.

"Why?" he said, bitterly; "because from the moment I met you I date all my evil fortune. At that time a straw would have turned me either into the path of good or evil. In a fatal hour I looked upon your face, was dazzled by your beauty. In your face I saw the look of an angel; how could I guess that the passions of a fiend raged within your heart? I linked my fortunes with yours, and from that moment my evil star was in the ascendent. You cast a blight over all my life. Can I forgive you? No! never while this heart beats within my breast, and I bear the name of Bertrand Tasnor!"

Lurlie did not cower before the fiery speech, but undauntedly she faced the angry man.

"And you?" she cried; "have you nothing to answer for in the past? Who lured me from my humble home, to follow the desperate fortunes of a penniless adventurer? It was you, Bertrand Tasnor; and then, when you tired of your victim, I was cast aside as a child throws away a broken toy. In the account between us, if there is to be a just reckoning, I am the wronged, not the wronger. And now, Bertrand, now that we meet after long years have passed, I am willing to forgive all the wrong that you have done me—willing to ask your pardon for all the harm that I have wrought you. I will even leave this old man who doats upon me as his darling; will give up all the wealth and splendor that now surround me, and follow you throughout the world, a submissive slave, if you will only give me back my child."

Bertrand gazed in astonishment upon the earnest face of the pleading woman. He found it difficult to believe in the existence of any good in the woman's nature.

But Bertrand was wrong.

No soil in this world so barren but that some seed will grow therein. No heart so bad, but some little trait of angel lurks within the darkness of the evil.

Bertrand made no reply to Lurlie's speech, but stood, cold as a marble statue, with folded arms.

"You do not answer!" Lurlie cried, in despair.

"I have already answered you," he said, coldly. "Do you think that I am a man of wax, that you may soften me with a warm breath, and then mold me to your purpose?"

"You will not be merciful, then, and grant my prayer,

even when I offer to give up every thing in this world that I possess and to follow you blindly?"

"Lurlie, I am no fool. You offer to go with me. How long would you remain contented? Do you think that I do not know you? I should go to sleep some night in your arms, and wake either below or above. Oh, no; I know you too well to trust my life in your keeping. Besides, I want a share of the wealth that you now possess. It is my game to have you remain here, to still continue to be the wife of the old captain, and so hold control over his purse. Through your fear I reach his money-bags."

"How can you retain a hold on me, even if you do know where my child is?" asked Lurlie, in wonder.

"You love that child, though you have not seen her for years?"

"Yes."

"Would you like evil to come to her?"

"No, heaven forbid!" answered Lurlie, fervently.

"Good; that is the power I possess over you."

"I do not understand."

"Why, if you refuse to do my will, evil will come to the girl!"

"From you?" asked Lurlie, horrified.

"Yes, from me?" replied Bertrand, sternly.

"What! would you harm your own child?"

"To be revenged upon you, yes," answered Bertrand, firmly. "Lurlie, you ought to know my nature well enough by this time to understand that I don't shrink from any thing to accomplish my purpose. I mean to bend you to my will, and through your child I reach your heart."

For a few moments Lurlie was silent. Busy thoughts were flashing across her brain. There was a peculiar expression upon her face that Bertrand did not like. His keen eyes, eagerly watching her features, noted the change of expression.

"Is my child now in Chicago?" she asked, quietly.

"I shall not answer that question," he said.

"Then she is not in the city?"

"I think that will be difficult for you to find out," he said, sneeringly.

"Perhaps so." There was a lurking devil visible in the eyes of Lurlie as she spoke.

"Well, have you concluded to yield to my demand?"

"No," replied Lurlie, firmly.

"What!" cried Bertrand, fiercely. "You wish me then to strike you through your child?"

"You can not do so!" said Lurlie, coldly.

"I can not do so! What do you mean?"

"Why, that I have guessed your cleverly planned device. You thought to work upon my fears for my child to force me to your will. You have lied to me. You do not know where my daughter is; you do not know whether she is living or dead."

"You will soon see!" exclaimed Bertrand, angrily.

"Yes, I will soon see whether my child is in Chicago or not. To-morrow I will have every detective officer in this city in search of her. I have plenty of money, Bertrand Tasnor—money that I will use, not to buy your silence, but to find my child and to punish you if you do her harm." Like an inspired priestess, Lurlie spoke.

"Foolish woman; you will brave me then?" Bertrand said.

"Yes, brave and defy you!"

"Take care! I may take vengeance into my hands even now!" cried Bertrand, fiercely, and advancing a step toward her.

Quick as thought, Lurlie drew a little revolver from her pocket, and, cocking it, leveled the weapon full at Bertrand's breast.

"If you come near me, I will fire. I would not willingly have your blood upon my soul, but you shall not lay hands on me."

Bertrand's face was distorted with passion; he felt that he was overmatched, and the anger of a demon was raging in his soul.

"Do you want to hang for my murder?" he asked.

"Do you suppose even for a single instant, that, if I were to kill you outright, I could not find some plausible excuse for the deed? Could I not swear that it was in defense of my honor that I shot you? They do not hang women very often nowadays, particularly when they have plenty of money to pay the fees of learned counsel."

"I was a fool to think of violence toward you. No, Lurlie, my blow will reach you through the heart of your child." Then Bertrand moved toward the door.

"I defy your malice!" Lurlie said, scornfully.

"Before one week is over you will repent those words," and Bertrand left the room.

"And before this night is over, you, Bertrand Tasnor, will stand before your Judge. Your cold heart will be colder still in the chill embrace of the grave. Your malice will be powerless to do me harm," and as she spoke, Lurlie sunk into a chair, her face glowing with angry fires.

Bertrand proceeded down-stairs after leaving the room. He was not overpleased with the result of his interview. He had expected that the bare mention of her child would bend Lurlie, like a willow wand, unto his will.

At the foot of the stairs he found Aimee. She had apparently been waiting for him.

"Good news, Bertrand," she cried. "Mrs. Middough has had a love interview with young Kelford. He is to come to-morrow night again. I am sure that she will speak plainly then, and tell him who it is that she loves. It would be a good idea if there were some witnesses to the interview."

"A capital idea!" cried Bertrand; "there shall be witnesses."

A few words more passed between them and then Bertrand left the house.

Bertrand had little idea that three pair of eyes were watching him—that three dark forms were stealing, silently as red Indians, upon his footsteps. Unconscious of danger he walked onward.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

CAUTIOUSLY the three men followed in the footsteps of Tasnor. He, proceeding onward, busy in thought, did not observe his usual caution and keep his eyes on the watch for danger; for Bertrand Tasnor, in the city of Chicago, was like the traveler on the far western plains. He looked more for enemies than for friends in all comers. A man of desperate fortunes, his hand was against all, and all men's hands were against him. Had he noted the three that were following him so closely, he would have guessed instantly that they were enemies, and he would have guessed rightly. But he proceeded onward, unconscious of the danger that lurked so closely behind him.

"You're sure that thar ain't no mistake this time?" growled the tallest of the three, who was the notorious Dick Goff in person.

"No, he's the one," answered one of the other two, and the tone of the voice betrayed that it was old Casper, Lurlie's father, that spoke.

"We'll lay him now, you bet!" said Dick, emphatically.

By this time Bertrand had reached State street, and then he halted on the corner and looked up the street.

"He's going to take a car," said Dick. The three had sought the shelter of a doorway to conceal them from Bertrand, should he chance to turn around.

"What shall we do?" asked the smallest of the three, Dick Goff's partner, who was known as Tommy Bedford, and who was a bright and shining light among the shoulder-hitters of the Garden City.

"We had better walk right up to the corner and then walk down the street a little way, and there wait till he gets on board of a car, then we can get on the front platform," said Casper.

"And we kin keep our eyes on him like a mice," said Goff, with a hoarse chuckle.

Acting on the suggestion, the three left the shelter of the doorway and walked boldly up the street.

They passed Tasnor, who, standing on the corner, busy in thought, did not notice them at all.

The three walked down the block about half way; then they halted.

"Now, if he changes his mind and don't take a car, why we kin keep our eyes on him just the same," explained Casper.

"And if he does take a car, why we kin foller him too," said Dick, with a grin.

"Exactly," replied Casper.

The three did not have long to wait for a car coming past Bertrand, he hailed it and got on board.

When the car reached the three, who were tracking Bertrand so carefully, they also got on, but without stopping the car, and took possession of the front platform.

Bertrand, whose thoughts were far from being pleasant ones, annoyed, and out of temper, paid little heed to what was passing around him. He had no idea that three pair of sharp eyes were eagerly fixed upon him and watching his every movement.

At Madison street, Bertrand left the car and proceeded in the direction of the west side.

The three watchers also left the car and again followed, cautiously, in the footsteps of their destined victim.

"If he's a-goin' to cross the bridge now, the center of it would be a good place to go for him," said Dick.

"Yes, but he'll hear our footsteps behind him," said Casper.

"I can fix it," replied Dick. "I'll get ahead of him, cross the bridge, and then turn and meet him about the center of it. Tommy, here, kin foller purty close on his heels. I s'pose you don't want to be mixed up in the row?"

"No, of course not. I shouldn't pay you if I was going to put the man out of the way myself," growled Casper.

"In coorse; that's natural," said Dick, with a grin; "but I thought that maybe you'd like to have a hand in the fun. But, please yourself and you'll please me. Well, as I were a-sayin', Tommy an' I'll go for him on the bridge. You kin stay at the end, and then arter we lay him out, you kin hand over the greenbacks. Ain't that fair?"

"Yes, that's all right," replied Casper.

"We'll go for him, then," said Dick, coolly, just as if he was proposing that they should all go and take something. "Mind, Tommy; foller him purty close. I'm off." And with the parting caution, Dick left the other two and hastened onward.

He soon overtook and passed Bertrand. That personage, walking slowly onward, his eyes fixed on the ground, moody and abstracted, took little heed of the man who went by him so rapidly. Besides, the night was very dark, and one could hardly see a dozen paces before him.

Tommy and Casper quickened their walk a little and soon came within ten paces of Bertrand.

Tasnor reached the bridge and disappeared in the gloom that enshrouded it.

Casper halted on the edge of the bridge.

"When you have finished him, come here and you shall have the money," he said.

"All correct," said Tommy, drawing an ugly-looking bowie-knife from beneath his shabby coat. "You won't hear no noise for to speak of, 'cos these dogs bites werry sharp but never bark at all," and he held up the knife as he spoke.

"Be sure you finish him," said Casper, and he spoke as coolly as though he was planning the death of a blind kitten.

"Don't you worry; he'll never know what hurt him," and then the ruffian followed the footsteps of Bertrand, and the ink-like gloom soon hid his form from old Casper's watchful eyes.

"He'll soon be out of the way," muttered Casper, to himself, as he watched the figure of the rough disappear in the darkness. "Once he is dead, he won't be apt to trouble my little gal any more. It's funny that Lurlie never told me about this feller before. I s'pose, though, she hated to speak of him."

Then Casper listened eagerly. He could hear the distant footfalls sounding faintly, on the bridge.

"They'll be at it soon," he muttered, as intently he strained every nerve to catch the sound of the struggle that would bring freedom or death.

Suddenly the sound of the footsteps ceased. Either the two had passed out of hearing, or else they were pausing and preparing for the struggle, and yet that was unlikely, for, if Bertrand had discovered the trap laid for him, he was not the man to meet his death without a desperate struggle for his life.

"It's lucky for us that thar ain't anybody 'round," muttered Casper; "but, what kin they be waiting for? They ought to have settled him by this time."

"Ah!" and Casper listened, eagerly.

From the center of the bridge came the sound as if a slight scuffle was taking place there—such a noise as a couple of young men would be apt to make skylarking together.

"Tain't much of a rumpus," muttered Casper, as eagerly he listened. Then, as suddenly as it had commenced the noise ended.

Following the scuffle, borne on the wings of the night-

wind, came the sound of a stifled groan, and then again all was still.

"They've fixed him!" cried the old man, in glee, and he rubbed his hands together, cheerfully, as he spoke.

Then he heard the sound of stealthy steps approaching him, rapidly, from the bridge.

Two dark figures emerged from the gloom.

The two were Goff and Bedford.

"Come on," said Goff, in a hoarse voice, as he passed, rapidly, by old Casper; "there's some one coming on the other side of the bridge. Whoever it is, they'll be apt to diskiver the cove we've laid out, and we'd better be goin'."

Without a word Casper followed the two.

A couple of blocks down the street, by a lamp-post, the party halted.

"Now then, old man, shell out," said Goff, tersely.

"You've finished him all right?"

"Yes, a straight lick right through the heart."

"And he made no struggle?"

"How could he? we didn't give him a chance. I pretended to be drunk and tumbled ag'in' him, then when he held me up, I let him have it. One good lick. He never even hollered; he only moaned like, and then went down like a stuck pig."

"Why didn't you throw the body into the river?"

"Why didn't I? Wouldn't the splash have made noise enough for to bring somebody down onto us?"

"That's true."

"True, you bet it is; but come, fork over the soap."

Casper counted the bills into the brawny paw of the rough.

"There, that is correct, isn't it?" he asked.

"That is O. K.," replied Dick, stowing away the bills in a greasy wallet, "and, I say, the next time you've got a job like this, don't forget your humble servants to command."

"That's all right."

"Good-night, old man. Come, Tommy, let's be traveling." And the two roughs crossed over the street, and turning down Wells street were soon lost to sight.

"He's out of the way, then," muttered the old man. "I must go and see Lurlie the first thing in the morning and tell her that I've fixed the job up all straight. It wasn't half as much trouble as I expected it would be."

Slowly Casper proceeded homeward. No weight of guilt was on his mind when he thought of the man whom his instruments had made their victim.

About nine o'clock the next morning, old Casper called upon his daughter. Attired in a plain suit of black, he looked quite respectable.

Lurlie received him with an eager face.

"Well, father?" she questioned, breathlessly.

"It's all right, gal," he answered, with a chuckle, "I've fixed him."

"And is he—" Lurlie halted in the question.

"He's passed in his checks. He won't bother you not no more, you kin bet on that."

"Oh, father, if you only knew the misery that that man has caused me," and Lurlie shuddered as she thought of the past.

"Well, it's all right now." Then, briefly, he told the story of Bertrand Tasnor's death at the hands of the ruffians whom he had hired for the deed of blood.

"Human life isn't worth much in Chicago," said the girl, with a sad smile.

"Tain't worth much anywhar, gal, when thar's such fellers as these two roughs around."

After a few more words the old man departed.

"At last I can breathe freely!" cried Lurlie, when she was alone. "The cloud that shadowed my life has passed away, and in the future I see golden gleams of sunshine in the love of the man who is the idol of my heart."

But, Lurlie was but human, and who can guess the future?

CHAPTER XXX.

A DREAM AND A REVELATION.

CAPTAIN MIDDOUGH and Amos Kenwood, the man who

bore on his neck the scarlet scar, were sitting together in the reading-room of the Milwaukee Hotel.

Middough had visited Milwaukee on business, and Kenwood had accompanied him.

The old captain had noticed that his first officer had been strangely silent all day long. A deep weight seemed to be on his mind.

"What's the matter with you, Amos?" the captain asked, kindly. "Ain't you well?"

"Yes," replied Kenwood, quietly.

"What's the trouble, then? You've hardly said ten words to-day. Now, if it was me, separated as I am from the dearest little woman in the world, why, it would not be a wonder that I should feel dull and gloomy. But you; what on earth have you to trouble yourself about?"

Kenwood silently pointed to the scarlet ring that encircled his throat.

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Middough; "you are thinking of the past?"

"Yes," replied Kenwood; "you remember the story I told you one night on the deck of the Michigan as we were coming into Chicago?"

"Certainly I remember it. A man don't hear such a story as that every day."

"I should hope not," replied Kenwood, solemnly. "Well, captain, for the last three nights, in my dreams, that passage in my life has come back to me with all the startling earnestness of reality. Again have I felt the cord tightening around my throat, heard the wail of despair that came from the lips of the poor girl that I loved so well, as she fainted in the arms of the guerrilla leader when they swung me up by the side of the tall cottonwood. The whole scene came back to me as vividly as life. Why, captain, I could see the low shore opposite with the clump of timber growing down to the water's edge; could even hear the dull swash of the river as it beat against the bank in its restless onward passage to the ocean."

"And you dreamed about this?"

"Yes, for three nights in succession, and each night I have awakened just as I was feeling the terrible pain that the rope gave me, choking my life out. I tell you, captain, it's a horrible thing to dream of, and the dream is really as painful as the reality was," and, as he spoke, the strong man actually shuddered at the remembrance.

"It is strange that this affair should haunt you so."

"Yes; I can not understand it."

"Have you been thinking of the affair before you went to bed?"

"No; I have tried to avoid thinking of it. I can not understand it in the least. If I was a believer now in presentiments, I should think that it was a warning that I should soon meet this man who put this indelible mark upon me, and that the dreams were sent to keep alive the memory of the terrible affair."

"What was the name of this man?"

"Bertrand Tasnor."

"An odd name."

"Yes. By birth, I believe, he was a French Creole; but by nature and instincts, he was a devil."

"And you have never met him?"

"No; after the war closed, I went to Little Rock on purpose to meet him and square up the vengeance that I owed him. I expected of course that, after the surrender of the Confederate armies, he would naturally come to Little Rock."

"And he did not?" Middough asked.

"No; he feared to come. I was not the only man in Arkansas that thirsted for revenge upon him. I met a dozen or so rough Union men from Northwestern Arkansas—the Boston mountain region—who had a little debt to settle with this same Bertrand Tasnor. But they, like myself, were disappointed. He had evidently scented danger and kept out of the way."

"It is hardly possible that you should meet him now after this lapse of years," Middough said.

"Captain, I have noticed that the most impossible things happen, sometimes, in this world. It does seem improbable that I should ever meet this man again, and yet, the conviction is gradually taking possession of my mind that I shall, and speedily, too."

"And then?"

"I think I will close the account between us, and the ending will be a bloody one," replied Kenwood, moodily.

"Do you think you would know him?"

"Know him!" repeated Kenwood. "Yes. I could pick him out of a crowd of ten thousand at a single glance. His face is not a common one, and I saw it last night just as plainly as I did six years ago when he stood by my side and ordered his men to swing me up by the side of the cottonwood. If there is any thing at all in dreams, I feel sure that I am going to meet this man, and here at the North, by the side of Lake Michigan, settle the debt that was incurred in the South, by the muddy Arkansas."

"To-morrow we'll return to Chicago," said Middough, abruptly changing the conversation. "Ah! Amos, you're an unmarried man, so of course you can't understand how anxious I am to get back to the little woman that I call wife."

"You are happy, then, in the marriage state, captain?" Kenwood asked.

"Happy! Amos, my boy, I can hardly express my feelings on the subject. To think that an old weather-beaten man of the world, like myself, should be fortunate enough to secure such a treasure as I have in my little wife; why it's wonderful." And the old captain rubbed his hands together in glee.

"And you are completely happy, then, captain?"

"Yes; and what is more, I feel that my happiness is likely to last for many a long day." And the old sailor stroked his chin complacently as he spoke.

Little can we poor mortals guess the future! At the very moment that Captain Middough was boasting of his good fortune, a tall, dark-haired stranger was examining the hotel register in the office in search of the captain's name.

Carefully the stranger ran his eyes down the list of names. Suddenly his face lighted up with a smile of triumph as he beheld Captain Middough's bold signature.

"That's my man," murmured the stranger to himself. Then he addressed the clerk:

"Can you tell me if Captain Middough of Chicago is in at present?"

"Yes, sir," replied the clerk, who knew the captain well.

"I saw him a moment ago in the reading-room. Jim," and he called a servant passing at the moment, "tell Captain Middough that a gentleman wishes to speak to him. You will find him in the reading-room."

The servant departed with the message.

It is astonishing what a difference trifles sometimes make in this world. Had the stranger sought the captain in the reading-room in place of the servant, there would have been a terrible affray, and one, if not two of the principal characters of our story would have met an untimely death. But it was not fated so to be.

In obedience to the message, and in some little astonishment, the old captain came from the reading-room.

"That the gemmer, sar," said the negro, indicating the stranger who stood carelessly leaning against the office bar.

The man was a stranger to the captain.

"You wish to see me, sir?" Middough asked.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Captain Middough?"

said the stranger, in polished tones.

"Yes, sir," replied Middough, bluntly. There was something about the stranger that he did not like.

"I am glad to meet you, sir," said the stranger, not in the least discomposed by the captain's not overpolite style.

"You want to see me, sir?" asked Middough, abruptly.

He had taken a decided dislike to the cool, quiet stranger at the first glance.

"Yes, sir; but what I have to say to you must be said in private. If it is not asking too much, will you grant me a few moments' conversation with you in your room?"

"If it is absolutely necessary—" growled the captain, who didn't like the stranger's manner at all.

"It is necessary," replied the stranger, blandly, "and when I tell you that my business concerns your wife in Chicago, you will probably feel inclined to grant my request for a private interview."

"My wife!" gasped Middough, his florid cheeks turning white with apprehension, "she is not ill?"

"No, sir," said the stranger, with a peculiar smile; "not ill in body."

"Thank heaven for that!" cried the old man, earnestly. He did not notice the hidden meaning in the simple phrase used by the stranger.

"Will you grant me the interview?"

"Yes; follow me, if you please," said the captain, shortly. Then he led the way to his apartment. And all the way he bothered his brains trying to think what the stranger

could possibly have to say to him in regard to his wife, Lurlie.

In the room, Middough motioned the stranger to a chair.

"Now, sir," he said, after the stranger was seated, "what have you to say concerning my wife?"

"If I have been rightly informed, sir, your wife was but a poor girl when you married her?"

"What business is that of yours—or anybody's else's?" cried the captain, bluntly.

"I am not saying that it does concern me or anybody else in the least," answered the stranger, coolly. "I am merely stating it as a fact. It is a fact, is it not?"

"Well, suppose it is?" said the captain, gruffly.

"Then she should not only owe you the love and obedience due from a wife to her husband, but also the gratitude due to the man who had raised her from poverty to wealth."

"What the devil are you driving at?" asked the captain, in a surly way.

"Your wife should love and honor you, should she not?" said the stranger, coolly.

"She does!" said Middough, fiercely.

"And if I were to tell you that she is deceiving you?"

"I'd choke the lie in your cursed throat!" cried Middough, in anger, and advancing toward the stranger.

"Your wife is false to you, and loves a younger lover." Cold as ice came the words from the lips of the stranger.

"You lie, you villain!" cried Middough, in rage, and he essayed to take the stranger by the throat, but though a strong and muscular man, he was an infant in the iron grip of the other, who easily pushed him back into a chair.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," said the man, quietly.

"I can give you proofs that your wife is false to you, if I'm paid for so doing. Of course I won't take the trouble for nothing. Give me one hundred dollars, and to-night, with your own ears you shall hear your wife declare that she married you solely for your money, and that she has given the love due you to a younger man."

"I accept the offer!" cried Middough, fearfully excited, "and if she has deceived me, I'll kill her with my own hand."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A TERRIBLE SURPRISE.

It was on the night following the one whereon the stormy interview between Mrs. Middough and Bertrand had taken place.

Lurlie sat in her boudoir.

Before her was a full-length mirror, that reflected back her form.

In the glass Lurlie watched herself.

A smile of triumph was on her face, as in the glass she saw the reflection of her own beautiful features.

"It is nearly time for Kelford to come," she murmured, musing, twining her fingers as she spoke, caressingly, in the shining, golden curls that stole, coquettishly, down upon the pure white forehead. "Will I triumph? Can I make him love me?" And as she put the question a smile upon the face reflected in the mirror answered it. "Yes, I can make him love me. I am sure of it. If he comes, before he leaves this room I will have him at my feet, and from the floor will I raise him to my arms. But, I am this old man's wife!" And as she spoke, an angry cloud came over her face.

"What of that?" she cried, impetuously. "Can I not find some way to free myself from the chains that bind me to him, if I succeed in winning the love of the idol of my heart? Yes, I am sure that I can. Kelford must—he shall love me. He must forget this pale-faced girl, who does not know the value of the love she spurns. Strange how the memory of that girl's face affects me whenever I think of it. The sight of her face recalls to me the old, old time when I, a merry, sinless child, played about my mother's knee. And now, what am I? A desperate, reckless woman. A hard fortune has made me what I am; had I been differently situated in life, possibly I might have been a better creature. But there is yet time to change my way of life. In the future I will be different. The love of Edmund Kelford shall make me a better woman. I will strive to be worthy of him; strive to be the angel that my face says I am, rather than the devil that my heart has made me. But one task more—to free myself from this old man. Oh! how I loathe him! I shudder at his caresses. Then a

long dream of peace and love." Over her face came a holy calm; the blue eyes, now soft and loving in their look, gave no sign of the fire that lurked within their depths.

"The blighting presence of Bertrand Tasnor is forever removed from my life-path. How easy it was to destroy this man who so pitilessly assailed me! Could he have spoken the truth when he said that my child—our child—was living?" And as she asked the question a look of anguish came over her face.

"No," she said, after thinking for a moment, "I do not believe that he spoke the truth. It was but a device on his part to force me to comply with his demands. I will be sure, though. To-morrow I will employ the detective officers. If my girl is in Chicago I will find her. I am sure that I should know my child in an instant. The holy instinct of a mother is within my breast, and I'm sure that it could not be deceived."

Lurlie buried her head in the soft cushions of the arm-chair, wherein she sat, and closed her eyes as if in thought. Over her face came a smile of joy. She was dreaming—a day-dream—of the happiness that awaited her in the love of Edmund Kelford.

A slight tap at the door disturbed her reverie.

"Come in," she said, hardly stirring from her position.

The door opened, and Aimee, her maid, entered.

"A gentleman wishes to see you."

"Is it Mr. Kelford?" Lurlie asked, a slight trace of eagerness in her voice.

"Yes, ma'am," the girl, replied. And as she spoke, there was a peculiar expression shining in her glittering, dark eyes that Lurlie, engrossed as she was in joy at Kelford's coming, did not notice.

"Bring him up here, please; and, Aimee, if any one else calls to-night, say I am not at home."

"Yes, ma'am," replied the girl, and then she left the apartment.

"Will the task be a difficult one to reveal the truth to him?" Lurlie questioned, musingly. "A few minutes will decide. I feel sure that I can make him love me. I wonder if he suspects the truth? He must; he is no fool. If he does guess the truth and comes, it is clear, then, that he wishes me to speak plainly. I must do it. I am not a young girl to be wooed, but a married woman, and I must be the wooer."

A low tap on the door again interrupted Lurlie's thoughts.

In obedience to her command, Aimee showed Kelford into the room, and then discreetly retired, closing the door behind her.

Kelford was habited in a complete suit of black. His face was quite pale, and a hectic spot burned in each cheek. His eyes, too, were restless and uncertain. He seemed like one under the influence of some terrible spell, and Edmund Kelford was under that influence. He knew that he was doing wrong in coming to see the fair-haired siren. There is no master in this world so terrible as passion—no slave so wretched as passion's slave.

Kelford knew full well that he was treading the path to evil, yet he blindly closed his eyes to the dreadful consequences and pressed onward; true, with wavering footsteps, yet still he went onward.

"Oh! I am so glad you have come!" exclaimed Lurlie, rising, eagerly, to receive him.

"Yes, I promised you that I would come, and I always keep my promises," replied the young man. And even as he spoke, his voice sounded in his ear hollow and unnatural.

"Pray be seated," and Lurlie wheeled the arm-chair around.

Almost mechanically, Kelford took the proffered seat.

"I shall never be able to thank you for your kindness," said Lurlie, with one of her brightest smiles.

Kelford felt the spells of the fair-haired, blue-eyed beauty weaving their web of entrancement around his heart. The subtle poison of human passion, inflamed by youth and beauty—woman's witchery—was filling every vein. One safeguard alone had he, the memory of Pearl Cudlipp's sweet, innocent face. That face, pure as the face of a saint, "niched in cathedral aisles." But that pure memory was fading slowly from his mind. The bright face of the siren before him, radiant in youth and beauty, fresh in its loveliness, and beaming full of tenderness on him, was slowly, but surely, blotting out the remembrance of the other.

"I am sure that I have never shown you any kindness to call for especial mention," said Kelford, slowly.

"But, you have shown yourself to be my friend, and,

Heaven knows, I need friends bad enough," Lurlie replied, with a sigh, and as she cast down her beautiful eyes, Kelford noticed that a tear-drop glistened on the golden lashes.

No influence in this world so quick to reach a man's heart as the tears of a woman.

"You are in trouble, then?" he asked.

"Have you forgotten what I told you last night?" she said, raising her lustrous eyes again to his face.

"No, no," replied Kelford, quickly.

"Is not *that* trouble, then? What can produce greater agony in a woman's heart than to discover that she is bound for life to a man whom, in her soul, she feels that she can not love; but I am wrong; there is a more intense agony possible, and that is, when, bound in such chains, she meets the man that she feels she can love—that she does love with all the passion of her nature."

"But, that love is sin," said Kelford, making a brave effort to keep in the right path.

"And does that knowledge quench the love? No!" cried Lurlie, quickly. "I know that I am doing wrong not to love my husband. I know that it is sinful to let this other love take free possession of my nature, but I can not help it. It is in my heart. I can not disguise the truth from myself, and I will not from you. I am in passion's chains. I do not love my husband, and I do love this other man. It is my fate, and who can resist their fate?"

"Avoid the presence of this man; do not see him; then the love, not being fed by sight of him, will die within your heart." Kelford was striving hard to do right and give the counsel that a good and honest man should give.

"When that love dies then I will die too," replied Lurlie, sadly.

"Better, perhaps, that you should die than live with this guilty passion in your heart." Kelford was fighting the good fight, bravely.

"Perhaps so; yet, if it is my nature to love, am I to blame?" And Lurlie looked full into Kelford's face as she spoke. "Shall I not rather blame this man whose dangerous fascinations have made me love him—yes, love him in spite of myself? I have struggled against this sinful love. I have tried to banish it from my heart, but, my will is powerless against it. What then shall I do?"

Kelford was sorely puzzled. He half wished that he had not ventured to brave the consequences of this interview. He had come, strong in the determination to do what was right—to advise the wife of the old sailor as he would have advised a dear sister. But now he felt his resolution yielding; the spells of witchery were about his heart. He felt as if he was wandering in the mazes of a dream.

"I do not know how to advise you," Kelford said, slowly, "except that, when you are in the presence of this man, you must try to crush this feeling that you say you have in your heart toward him."

"And how can I crush that?"

"Think of the duty—the love you owe your husband."

"When I am by the side of the man I love, I can think of nothing but him," cried Lurlie, quickly. "You do not understand my position in regard to my husband. I have never loved him as a wife should love her husband. I was dazzled by his wealth and the luxury that he promised should surround me. He has kept his word. All that money can purchase he has given me; but all the money that there is in this great city will not compensate me for the absence of the love without which I can not live. Now—too late—oh, fatal words! I discover the truth. I feel that I can not live without love. Now, I hate my husband. I would rather have a snake coil its slimy folds around me than to feel the arms of the man whom, before the minister, I swore to love, honor and obey." Wildly came the words from her lips.

"This is terrible!" exclaimed Kelford.

"If merely hearing of the agony makes you say that it is terrible, what must it be to me who suffer it? Even now, in spite of the world, in spite of every thing that I hold dear, I would leave my husband—break the vows that I have taken, and follow this man faithfully, even though poverty and toil attended the path."

"Lurlie, you must not speak this way," said Kelford, rising in agitation.

"Shall I speak falsely, then, and conceal the truth that is in my heart?" she demanded, facing him with fire; not the fire of anger, but of passion.

"Oh, I do not know what to say!" groaned Kelford, in agony.

"Why? Have you guessed the truth? Have you guessed *who* the man is that I love—love better than I do my own soul? I prove that by being willing to give away my hope of my soul's salvation for the sake of that love." And Lurlie extended her hand earnestly toward Kelford as she spoke.

"Yes, I have guessed it," Kelford murmured, slowly.

"Then I may confess the truth. Edmund Kelford, *you* are the man I love! For your sake I will leave husband, all, and go with you, if you bid me so to do. Oh, Edmund, can you not love me?"

And as, with outstretched arms, Lurlie approached the young man, the door behind her that led into her bed-chamber opened suddenly, and there in the doorway, with a face purple with passion, stood Captain Middough, and, smiling with the smile of a demon over his shoulder, were the bronzed features of Bertrand Tasnor!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A HOLLOW TRUCE.

LURLIE's face became as white as the face of one stricken with sudden death, when she turned and looked upon her husband.

The hot blood swept into Kelford's cheeks and temples. Never in all his life had he felt so thoroughly ashamed of himself.

It was evident that the old captain had overheard all. His face, purple with passion, and the big veins, swelling out like whip-cords on his forehead, showed that he fully understood how basely and cruelly he had been deceived.

But the bitterest gail to Lurlie was that her foe, Bertrand Tasnor, lived, and was a witness to her disgrace.

The lurid light was flashing from her eyes as undauntedly she faced her angry husband.

"Oh, you vile woman! have you no shame?" the captain cried, in accents hoarse with rage, as Lurlie faced him. "By heaven, I should strike you, woman and wife though you are, and lay you dead at my feet!"

With uplifted hand the old man advanced, as if to execute his menace upon her.

Kelford, transfixed with shame and horror, felt as if he was rooted to the spot whereon he stood. And Bertrand made no movement to restrain the angry man. He was gloating over the agony of Lurlie's position. Her shame was joy to him.

Lurlie stirred not, but with angry eyes looked upon her husband's face. She seemed not to fear, but rather to invite the blow.

The captain glared upon her for a moment. His anger swelling in every vein choked his utterance. Vainly he strove to speak.

A few hoarse sounds came, gutturally from his throat. His face grew more and more purple. Convulsively he tore open his shirt at the throat, as if the slight pressure of the neck-band was choking him. He gasped for breath—his stalwart form swayed to and fro, and then, with a convulsive groan, he fell forward on his face to the carpet, moaned once or twice, then rolled over on his back, *dead!*

"Merciful heaven!" cried Kelford, "he is dead!" then, with a cry of horror, the young man fled from the room.

Over Lurlie's face swept an expression of joy, while Bertrand's bronzed features wore a look of blank dismay. The blow he had planned so carefully, and which he intended should prove Lurlie's ruin, had been defeated by the sudden death of the captain. The very means he had adopted to humble her had resulted in her triumph.

"Ah, Bertrand Tasnor!" she cried, in wicked glee; "you see that fate itself befriends me. My husband is dead. I am free and I owe that freedom to you."

Even in the dark presence of death itself, Lurlie gloated over her triumph.

"Curses on the luck!" Bertrand muttered between his firm-set teeth.

"And now leave this house!" cried Lurlie, imperiously, and she waved her hand toward the door as she spoke.

"Do not be alarmed; I have no wish to enjoy your charming society any longer than I can possibly help!" he said, grimly, moving to the door. "One consolation, though, remains for me. Though you are free, and I have contributed to that freedom, yet you are a beggar, compared to what you were. But a small part of the captain's wealth will come to you. There, at any rate, I triumph."

"You do not triumph at all, Bertrand Tasnor," and Lurlie laughed, exultingly, as she spoke. "The captain was an old man, liable to die at any moment. Do you suppose, even for a single instant, that I have not thought of such an event and provided against the evil that it would inflict upon me? You think too poorly of me, Bertrand. You should know me better. Captain Middough has made a will. In that will I am left the sole heir to all that he has in the world. You are beaten again. I can thank *you* that this old man, to whom I was bound, is dead, and that I now shall enjoy with my freedom all that his life could have given me."

Without a word, Bertrand turned upon his heel and left the room. He had been defeated at all points. The mine, fired by his own hand, had damaged only himself. Bitter, indeed, were his thoughts, and angry were his brows as he descended from the scene of death.

"I am free!" cried Lurlie, exultingly, "free to win the love of Edmund Kelford! He can not blame me for this terrible scene for it was my love for him that provoked it."

Then Lurlie summoned the household.

Wild was her grief over the body of her husband when surrounded by the servants.

The sudden death of Captain Middough surprised no one.

A man well advanced in years, and naturally full-blooded, that he should be stricken with apoplexy, was not to be wondered at.

Captain Middough was followed to the tomb by a large concourse of Chicago's best citizens.

The deep grief of the young and beautiful widow touched every heart. That she sincerely loved the captain was patent to all.

No money was spared in the funeral, and a magnificent marble shaft bearing the simple sentence, "My husband," marked the spot where lay the body of the old sailor.

The young widow did all that she could to show the world how much she loved the memory of the lost one.

Oh! the mockeries of this life!

Lurlie, the widow of the old sailor, young and beautiful, and worth, in her own right, over two hundred thousand dollars, was far more respected and admired than she had been as the wife of the captain.

Money is a golden mask; what does it not hide? It makes the old young; the ugly beautiful, and wraps a mantle of innocence over the scarlet breast of crime.

It was some three days after the burial of the old captain, that Lurlie, seated in her boudoir, received a message that a gentleman desired to see her on particular business.

On entering the parlor, to her astonishment, she found that the "gentleman" was Bertrand Tasnor.

The ex road-agent was habited in a plain, dark suit, and looked every inch the gentleman, forming quite a contrast to his former roughness of dress.

Lurlie frowned when she saw who her visitor was.

"You here?" she said, in an angry tone.

"Of course," replied Bertrand, coolly; "what more natural than for an old friend like myself to call upon and condole with you upon the loss that you have met?" There was a slight touch of sarcasm in Bertrand's voice; Lurlie's keen ear detected it at once.

"Bertrand Tasnor, instantly explain your business—that is, if you have any with me, which I doubt—or else I will call the servants to eject you from the house."

Bertrand listened with a calm smile to the threat.

"A great deal of the tiger about you as well as the angel, eh, Lurlie?" he said; "but, I have business with you," he continued. "I suppose it is useless to speak of the past. We were once lovers, Lurlie, and then, as if by magic, the love turned to hate and we were foes. Years passed on. I came back to Chicago, little dreaming that such a person as Lurlie Casper was in existence. Fate brought us together again—together as foes, for the hate had lasted if the love had been evanescent. Twice you sought my life. First by steel, second by the vapor of gas. Both times you failed. Then, for the third time, you essayed to kill me by means of your worthy father and two ruffians hired by him for the purpose. They waylaid me at night on the Madison street bridge. I was alone, unarmed. It was a narrow squeeze for life. What do you suppose saved me?"

"The devil who protects your life!" cried Lurlie, in anger.

"You are right; I was saved by evil hands, not by good. The men that your father employed to kill me were old acquaintances of mine. Many a deed of blood had they done under my leadership in the mines of Montana. So

that, when on the bridge their hands were raised to strike, they discovered that their victim was their old leader, Captain Death, as they used to call me in far-western mountains, and they paused. A few words explained all. I thought it better that you should think me dead than living, so I told them to deceive your father, and to swear that they had killed me. Besides, I needed the money which you were to pay for my death, for the two fellows were only too glad to have me again for a leader, and offered to turn one-half of the plunder over to me if I would join with them. So you see, Lurlie, I am strong now. Three desperate pair of hands, with a head like mine to plan out the work, can do a great deal."

"I do not fear you," said Lurlie, scornfully. "I own I have tried to kill you, and I am sorry that I have failed. But, in the future, I shall trouble you no more unless you attack me. Whatever my past life may have been, I mean that my future one shall be blameless."

"You are honest in your speech; I can't deny that. I suppose after a reasonable time elapses you will marry this young Kelford, and in his arms find sweet forgetfulness for all the misery of the past."

"Perhaps so," replied Lurlie, dryly.

"It is to aid you to accomplish this laudable purpose, that I have come to see you to day."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; like you, Lurlie, I am tired of waging war. Let there be peace between us. You have money. I need some of it. I can aid you and will, if you pay me for it."

"How?"

"You have a rival, Lurlie, for the love of Edmund Kelford. A dangerous one, too, for she is a young, pretty and innocent girl. More than that, this man loves her and she loves him. The love this Kelford feels for you is more animal passion than true love. Once let him discover that this girl does love him, and where will be your chance of winning him?"

"But, this girl does not love him."

"You are generally well-informed, Lurlie, but here you are in error. The girl does love him. For some few days he has not seen her. She pines over his absence. Her cheek is pale, and the dark circles around her eyes tell of sleepless and of tearful nights. Now, let them come together; the girl at one single word of love from his lips will confess the truth; tell him that he is loved in return. Then your castle of happiness that you have built in the air will tumble to atoms."

"But, how can you aid me in this?" Lurlie asked, with a thoughtful brow.

"I can remove the girl—put her where mortal eyes will never more look upon her face," said Bertrand, slowly.

"What! kill her?" And Lurlie's face was dark as night.

"Yes; give me five hundred dollars and the girl will never come between you and this man."

"I will do it!" cried Lurlie, suddenly; "to gain his love I would dare every thing. But, this shall be my last act of crime. Hereafter my life shall be spotless."

"That is what we poor humans always say," said Bertrand, rising. "One more, and I am done; but, that one more brings a dozen others in its train."

"It will not be so with me," said Lurlie, firmly. "When will this be done?"

"To-night. The girl Pearl leaves her shop about nine; we'll waylay her as she crosses the bridge—the very same spot where I was to have met my death."

"One word, Bertrand. At our last meeting you spoke of our child. Does she live?"

"No, I lied to you. Or, rather, I do not know whether she is living or dead, any more than you do." As Bertrand left the room, there was a peculiar smile upon his face—a smile wherein triumph was plainly written.

CHAPTER XXXIIL.

MURDER.

BERTRAND at the foot of the stairs met Aimee

"Bertrand, I have discovered something," she said, mysteriously.

"Indeed, and what is it?" he asked.

"Mrs. Middough is a wealthy woman."

"That is not a discovery; every one knows that."

"Yes, but a great part of that wealth she keeps here."

"Ah!" and the manner in which he spoke the simple exclamation told plainly how important he considered the discovery.

"In a little safe in her bedchamber, she has thirty thousand dollars in Government bonds, and a thousand or so in greenbacks."

"A nice little sum," said Bertrand, thoughtfully.

"Yes, is it not?"

"If you and I had that sum, Aimee, we might go to Europe and leave this cursed country to take care of itself." Bertrand spoke earnestly, but he watched the face of the girl keenly, as he gave utterance to the words.

"If we had it?" and the girl's eyes gleamed as she spoke.

"Why not take it?"

"Yes, but how?"

"She carries the key of the safe in her pocket-book. How easy to wait until she is asleep, then steal that key, open the safe, and the valuables will be ours." Aimee brought her lips close to Bertrand's ears as she spoke.

"An excellent idea; we will carry it out. I shall come to the house to-morrow night to see Mrs. Middough. After I have finished the business that I have with her, I'll pretend to leave the house, but you can hide me somewhere, and in the still hours of the night, when all are buried in slumber, we can carry out our plan."

"Yes, I will remember."

Then they parted and Bertrand left the house.

"Now, by my patron saint, the devil, all works well for me. This angel-fiend with all her cunning has something of the fool in her nature," he muttered, as he walked slowly down the avenue. "She thinks that I am willing to be her tool—I, that am her master, by right. She will know me better before forty hours are over. By that time she will have felt the vengeance that I am about to execute upon her. Like Sampson, her own hands will pull destruction down upon her head. How nicely she fell into the trap! How eagerly she accepted my offer! Yet, how could she guess that that offer concealed a deadly blow aimed at her by my hand? To-morrow night she shall feel my vengeance, feel it keenly, too, if my plans work well. A fortune, too, is in my grasp. It would be strange, if, after all these years of bitter struggling with sour misfortune, I should suddenly, by one blow, seize upon the wealth I crave. 'Who knows?' as the Mexicans say. The future looks bright. Why should I not strike a 'lead' of luck in this vein of mischance in which I have so long been working? I'll try it at any rate. And now to see my precious partners. It was a lucky chance that saved me the other night. As Lurlie says, it does seem as if the devil looked after me. They say he never deserts his own, and I'm sure that I'm a bright and shining light among his chosen ones."

Then, for a short time, he walked on apparently busy in thought, pulling the ends of his long mustache reflectively.

"I suppose I must take the girl," he muttered. "I don't see how I can get the money very well without her. Bah! I hate these women. They've always been the cause of all my ill-luck. Their love brings no good-fortune to me. It astonishes me sometimes to see how they cling to me, even when they must know that I care nothing for them. I suppose it's in their nature to love something. There's no such thing in my nature, though," and Bertrand laughed as he spoke.

He was right. His nature knew no such word as love, although he was sometimes swayed by passion's fires.

Bertrand took his way to Wells street. He found the two roughs, Goff and Bedford, in the same low saloon where old Casper had sought for them. With the two was the hunchback boy, Rick, who had faithfully followed the fortunes of Bertrand, whom he looked upon as a god among men.

"Well, boys," said Bertrand, as he entered, "I've got a job on hand."

"What is it, cap?" asked Goff.

"A gal to be put out of the way."

"And the price?"

"Five hundred."

"A werry tidy little swag," said Bertrand, with a grin.

"Yes, and we can earn it easy, too."

"How so, cap?"

"This girl works in a dressmaker's shop on Clark street near Madison. She lives over on the west side in Halsted street. She leaves the shop about nine o'clock at night.

Now, we must lay in wait for her, and when she is crossing the bridge, we must do the job."

"Why, that's the same place where we lay for you!" Goff exclaimed.

"Yes, I know it," Bertrand replied.

"How shall we finish her?" Goff asked.

"That is what we must decide now," said Bertrand, thoughtfully.

"Nine o'clock, you know, is pretty early," observed Goff.

"Yes, an' there's likely to be a lot of people 'round," said Bedford, continuing the speech.

"You are right; we must think of some way to do it quickly and without exciting attention, in case there should happen to be any one near us," Bertrand replied.

"She'll squeal like blazes, you know, if we don't finish her right off," Bedford said.

"That's so, and these women kick up a precious row, sometimes," continued Goff.

"Yes, but we mustn't give her a chance to make any row. She must be settled both quietly and quickly."

"But, how are you a-goin' to do it?" asked Goff.

"I have it!" cried Bertrand, suddenly; "we must knock her overboard into the river. Once in the water, in the darkness, she will never be rescued, but will surely drown."

"Why, the smell of it is enough to kill any one, let alone the water," said Goff, with an air of disgust. It was evident that he had not the least possible opinion of the famous Chicago "river."

"That plan will work, I am sure, and we shall run no risk of being detected. We can make her fall into the water appear the result of no design on our part."

"How so?" Goff asked.

"I will explain. We must watch the girl when she leaves the shop, and track her to the bridge. I will get in the center of the bridge and advance to meet her as she is crossing. You, Goff, will follow close behind her, and then, when she meets me, we'll close in suddenly upon her, throw her over the low railing into the water beneath; that will be easy enough, for it can be in a second, and before she can guess our purpose."

"And what am I to do?" asked Bedford.

"You will follow a little way behind Goff. Then, if any stranger comes behind you, why, you can stop him on some pretense, ask him the way to some place, or the time of night, and so keep him from coming near enough to see our attack on the girl."

"Yes, I'll ask him the way to the 'Armory'" (the Chicago Tombs); "I don't know where that is," said Bedford, with a grin.

"You, Rick, will be on my side of the bridge, and pursue the same course with any one that approaches from the direction of the west side." The moment we throw the girl over, we will cry out 'a suicide!' and raise the alarm. It is only one chance out of ten thousand of her being saved, for the night will be dark and she will probably be stunned on striking the water. We will say that, as she was passing the center of the bridge, she suddenly sprang over the railing. And you, Bedford and Rick, if you are near enough to see any thing, can also swear that you saw her leap over the railing. Of course, there is no apparent object why we should wish harm to the girl, and I do not think that there will be the slightest suspicion that we had any thing to do with her death."

"Oh, it will work like a mine!" cried Bedford, in glee.

"We shall finger the five hundred easy!" exclaimed Goff, joyfully.

The four remained in the saloon till about eight o'clock, and then set out upon their murder quest.

First they went to the little dressmaker's shop in Clark street. Within the shop they could see Pearl, their destined victim, sewing, steadily.

Bertrand had spoken but the truth when he had said that the girl was greatly changed.

A few days had made a wonderful difference in the face of Pearl Cudlipp. The roses bloomed no longer in the cheeks, and the luster had faded from the large gray eyes.

The girl looked quite ill.

Pearl left the shop just as the clocks were striking nine.

The four desperate characters followed upon her footsteps.

But the four were not the only ones who watched Pearl on her homeward road.

Kelford and his friend, Wirt Middough, had also been in waiting for the young girl, and they, too, followed.

Despite his friend's advice, Kelford would not show himself to the girl; for, in truth, he felt ashamed that he had neglected her, and he knew that he would show that shame in his face.

Had Kelford guessed the terrible danger that awaited the girl he loved, he would not have so quietly walked behind her.

Pearl hastened onward with rapid steps as usual.

The four plotters had assumed their places according to the programme drawn out by Bertrand.

The girl had nearly reached the center of the bridge. Kelford and Wirt, following behind, had just stepped upon the bridge when they were accosted and brought to a halt by Tommy Bedford, who wanted to know if they could direct him to the Illinois Central Depot.

Kelford was explaining the way thither, when he heard a slight scream proceeding from the darkness that vailed in the center of the bridge. A moment after, and the sound of a dull splash in the water below the bridge fell upon their ears.

"By goll! that gal must have jumped into the water!" cried Tommy, in affected astonishment.

"Help! a woman's jumped into the river," cried Bertrand's loud voice from the middle of the bridge.

The three ran to the center of the bridge. One glance Kelford gave at the inky surface below, and then plunged, headlong, into the stream.

Attracted by the cries, a crowd commenced to gather on the bridge, and a boat from a coal-barge, that lay just above the bridge, put out into the stream, manned by the watchmen of the barge.

Kelford had succeeded in finding the girl, and, aided by the boatman, bore the senseless form of Pearl to the dock.

Eagerly the crowd bent over the wet and motionless figure.

The rays of the lantern flashed upon a face that showed no sign of life.

"She is dead!" cried Kelford, in despair.

Bertrand's voice re-echoed the cry.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BERTRAND'S VENGEANCE.

LURLIE, in her widow's weeds, sat in her *boudoir* awaiting the coming of Bertrand.

The shades of night had descended upon the busy city, and with the night would come the man who had promised to remove a dangerous rival from her path.

She felt sure, too, that Bertrand had kept his promise, for in the morning papers she had read a brief notice, the tenor of which was, that a young girl had committed suicide by leaping from the Madison street bridge into the river.

She guessed that the girl was the one whose influence she feared with the man she loved; although by what means Bertrand had made her death appear to be the act of one bent on self-destruction, she could not guess.

"Perhaps I am wrong, and the notice does not concern her, but another," she said, musingly. "And yet, something within, tells me that it is she. If my presentiment be truth, there is now no barrier between Edmund Kelford and myself. I am a widow—a wealthy one, too, and this girl that he fancied he loved, is removed. The future then is all bright. Oh! how happy I shall be in his love!"

Lurlie was giving way to wild day-dreams. She thought not of the man—the old captain who rested beneath the sod, and whose love had given her all that she had in the world.

She thought not of the past but only of the future; the future that was to be so full of happiness.

The clock had just struck eight, when Bertrand was ushered into the room. Lurlie had given orders that he should be brought to her instantly on entering the house.

Lurlie could hardly restrain her impatience until the door closed behind the servant who had conducted Bertrand.

"Well?" she cried, in eagerness.

"It is well," he answered, with a smile.

"The girl?"

"Will never trouble you."

Lurlie drew a long breath of relief.

"You have kept your word, then?"

"Did you ever know me to break it?"

"No."

"I have not in this case. I promised you that the girl should be removed from your path, and I have kept that promise. Did you see any of the morning papers?"

"Yes, the *Tribune*."

"Did you notice the account of a girl committing suicide by jumping from the Madison street bridge?"

"Yes," Lurlie answered, eagerly.

"Well, that girl was Pearl Cudlipp."

"But I do not understand—"

"How she came to commit suicide, eh?" said Bertrand, with a smile. "Perhaps you will understand it better when I tell you that I was by the girl's side when she leaped into the river."

"Ah, now I understand you. Passing, you pushed her off the bridge."

"There is no one who can swear to it," said Bertrand, coolly.

"But it is the truth, though!"

"It is not impossible."

"Now there is no obstacle in my path to happiness!" cried Lurlie, in glee.

"Are you sure of that?" asked Bertrand, with a peculiar smile.

Bertrand's look made Lurlie tremble.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"Oh, nothing," he said, carelessly; "a chance remark—a thought, that is all."

"And that thought?"

"The old and trite expression, man proposes and fate disposes," said Bertrand, with a laugh. "You think that your life in the future will be one of peace and happiness; that, like a storm-buffed ship, you have passed through the angry and dangerous waves, and gained at last the harbor of safety."

"Yes, I do think so," said Lurlie, slowly. She felt sure that Bertrand's words, careless as they seemed, concealed some hidden meaning.

"Well, I hope that you will not be deceived," and again the peculiar smile appeared on Bertrand's face.

"I do not see how I can be," Lurlie replied. "By my husband's death I have come into possession of wealth enough to gratify every wish, and now that this girl is removed from my path, I do not see what can prevent me from winning the love of the man toward whom I feel the same passion that once filled my heart for you, Bertrand Tasnor, long years ago."

"And that passion lasted a remarkably long time," said Bertrand, with a sneer.

"Your fault, not mine!" cried Lurlie.

"I might say the same thing in regard to you," replied Bertrand.

"But, this man's love will make a better woman of me."

"And mine made you worse?"

"Yes."

"Very plain if not complimentary," said Bertrand, with a laugh.

"It is the truth."

"So you say."

"So all would say if they knew the history."

"Well, we'll let it pass," said Bertrand, lightly. "Let bygones be bygones. As the old saying is, 'let the past bury its dead.' And now to business. Lurlie, you promised me a certain sum of money for that service that I did you last night."

"Yes, and here it is," Lurlie said, counting the bills as she spoke, from her wallet into his hand.

"That is quite correct!" he exclaimed, when she had finished. "Why, Lurlie, you are quite a woman of business."

"There; and now we are done with each other."

"Done! do you want our acquaintance to end here?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that rather hard? Old friends like you and me to part in this cavalier way with the understanding that in the future we are to be as strangers to one another?" Though Bertrand uttered the words in a light and joking way, the dangerous light that gleamed in his eyes told that he was far from being in a humorous mood.

"Enough of this, Bertrand; all is over now between us,"

said Lurlie, haughtily.

"Are you sure of it?" Bertrand asked, with an air of menace.

"What do you mean by that question?" she cried. "Have I not braved you—yes, and beaten you, too, in all your attacks?"

"There again, I must put the question, 'are you sure?'" said Bertrand, with a smile full of ominous meaning.

"Do you wish to again test your power against mine?"

"No, not to test it again, for I have already dealt you a blow which you can not parry."

"You have?" said Lurlie, incredulously and scornfully.

"Yes."

"It must be a *powerful* one, for I have not felt it," and Lurlie's lip curled contemptuously.

"First a question, or perhaps a series of questions."

"Go on."

"You are wealthy?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of gaining the love that you seek?"

"Yes."

"And then you will be completely happy?"

"For the third time, yes."

"In the enjoyment of your wealth and in the arms of this young Kelford, you will find forgetfulness of all the past?"

"Yes, again, to that question."

"Forget even your child?"

Lurlie started at the question, but barely as much at the question as at the look of triumph that was on Bertrand's face.

A sudden fear took possession of her; a heavy weight seemed on her heart.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what I say," responded Bertrand; "in the midst of all this what a kind Providence spreads out before you, hiding the memory of your past life with the gloss of joy, you will even forget your child?"

"But she is dead!"

Bertrand laughed and triumph rung in the laugh.

"Lurlie, when I came to you, sued for peace and offered to become your tool, and for a paltry sum of money to do your bidding, did you not guess that my action concealed some hidden meaning? Did you think so poor of me as even for a moment to suppose that I, your master, would become your slave? No; that offer, Lurlie, concealed my vengeance. The death of this girl, Pearl Cudlipp, by violence, whom, in reality, you murdered, for I was but a tool in your hands, is my blow. When you know the truth, that blow will make you curse the hour when you first looked upon the face of this young Kelford and allowed this fatal love for him to enter your heart." Wild and swelling with devilish joy was Bertrand's voice.

"What do you mean?" asked Lurlie, in wonder. She guessed that some fearful truth was at hand.

"What do I mean?" and Bertrand's face fully showed his fierce joy as he asked the question. "Why, that this girl whom you hired me to murder, was *your own child!*"

With a wild shriek, Lurlie staggered back into a chair. Her features were white as death, and large drops of perspiration hung like waxen beads upon her forehead.

"No! no! it can not be!" she moaned.

"It is the truth!" Bertrand cried. "When first I saw the girl I noted the resemblance she bore to you, though her style of beauty was so different from yours. I followed up the clue; discovered all her history. The woman, Cavendish, in whose care you left the child, was a widow. She married again, this time to Stephen Cudlipp; hence the name of the girl. When I discovered the truth I formed my plan. When I came to you and offered to kill the girl, I knew then that she was your daughter. What do you think of my vengeance now? Do you triumph or do I not?"

Terrible was the tone in which Bertrand uttered the words.

"Oh, devil that you are!" moaned Lurlie. "Does not this deed tear your heart as well as mine? Was she not also your child?"

"What care I for that? My heart is marble. It was the only way in which I could strike you, and I would have done it, even if it had cost me my right hand!" cried Bertrand, fiercely.

"Oh, wretched woman that I am! Heaven have mercy on me, and let me die!" moaned Lurlie, in her agony.

Bertrand, with a cruel smile, gloated over her misery.

"And you had no mercy! a single word and both our

souls would have been free from this weight of guilt. But you are a tiger in human shape. You ruined my life years ago! But for you I should have been a good, pure woman; not content with turning into bitterness all my life, now you have killed my child." Then, with a sudden movement, Lurlie sprang to her feet. "Devil, you shall not live but die!" she cried, wildly, and springing forward in mad frenzy, attempted to catch him by the throat.

With an oath, Bertrand hurled her heavily back.

Turning as she fell, her head struck on the sharp corner of the heavy marble-topped table; the skull was pierced at the temple, and the death-blow had been received.

A single moan and Lurlie lay on the rich carpet, dying. The purple life-current stained the golden locks.

"Oh, my poor, poor baby," she moaned, in her deep despair. Then, with a few convulsive motions, Lurlie passed into unconsciousness, which deepened until the pulses ceased to throb.

The Heart of Fire was chilled by the cold fingers of death.

With a gloomy brow, Bertrand knelt by the body.

CHAPTER XXXV.

JOY AT LAST.

In agony of grief at Pearl's death, Kelford bowed his head, and the hot tear-drops, despite his efforts to keep them back, came slowly in his eyes.

"Remain here and see if they make any effort to revive her," said Bertrand in Bedford's ear; then he and Goff departed.

Bedford, the moment they were out of sight, took another look at the body of Pearl.

"What the blazes is the use of my staying here, I'd like to know? Blessed if I'm going to do it, and it's getting chilly, too." So, without more ado, he slunk away in the darkness.

Some two hours afterward he joined Bertrand and Goff at the low saloon on Wells street and reported that the girl had not recovered.

It was on his report that Bertrand had spoken so confidently in regard to the death of Pearl.

After Bedford's departure a young doctor passing, attracted by the crowd, came and stood by the side of the senseless girl. His practiced eye quickly decided that there was yet a chance to save her life.

Under his direction she was taken into the coal office near at hand and the usual means employed to resuscitate her.

Slowly but surely the life, that had apparently fled forever, came back.

Wild was Kelford's joy.

Wirt could not help sharing in it.

By the doctor's orders all the crowd, except the boatman, who was in charge of the office, and the two friends, Wirt and Kelford, whom he rightly conjectured to be friends of the unfortunate girl, were excluded from the room.

"She will recover," said the doctor, gazing hopefully into the white face.

"Oh, thank Heaven for that!" cried Kelford, fervently.

"You are friends of the lady?"

"Yes," Wirt answered.

"What could have induced her to attempt her own life?" asked the doctor, in wonder.

"I do not know; I can not even guess," replied Kelford.

"It is very strange," said the doctor, thoughtfully. "One as young and beautiful as she, should have no wish to seek forgetfulness in the river."

"It is true. Her reason for the act is a mystery to me," and Kelford was sorely puzzled to account for it. He had no suspicion, of course, of the facts.

"Luckily I've my little pocket medicine-case with me." And then the doctor forced a few drops of a reviving cordial through the firm-set teeth.

The magic effects of the liquor were soon apparent. The color came slowly back into the white, death-like cheeks.

"There; in an hour or so she will be very little the worse for her cold bath," said the doctor, cheerfully.

"I can hardly express to you, sir, how thankful I am for this service," said Kelford, warmly.

"Only my duty, nothing more," said the doctor, modestly.

Wirt essayed to put a ten-dollar bill, quietly, into his hand, but the young doctor modestly but firmly declined.

"Not in a case like this, gentlemen. I should feel

ashamed of myself if I took pay for this trifling service, but here is my card," and he gave the pasteboard to Wirt. "If at some future time you should need my services, professionally, I shall be proud to attend you."

This simple act was the making of the young doctor, for, in after time, through the influence of the two friends, he was introduced to an excellent practice. From such trifling causes come deepest consequences.

"I suppose you will care for the young lady, now?" the doctor continued.

"Yes, of course," answered Kelford, eagerly.

"You had better get a carriage and take her home. All she needs is rest and perfect quiet. When you get her home, she had better be put to bed at once in warm flannels." Then the doctor departed.

A coach was procured and the still unconscious girl placed in it.

"You will tell the driver where to go?" Kelford asked of his friend.

"Yes, of course. You get inside and look after her. I'll get on the box with the driver," Wirt answered.

Kelford did not wait for a second bidding.

In the coach he supported the slender form of Pearl in his arms.

Fondly he pressed her to his breast, and kissed the cold lips with many a passionate kiss.

Little by little, consciousness came back to the maiden.

She did not fully realize her position. It seemed to her like a dream; yet she knew that she was in her lover's arms, knew that his lips were pressing hers. She was happy. She did not resist, but wound her arms tightly around his neck and yielded her lips up to his caresses.

Half unconscious, she yet tacitly admitted the love that filled her heart, but which her lips had never told.

Kelford was in a wild dream of happiness.

From that dream he was rudely awakened by the sudden stopping of the coach.

He wondered at the stoppage, for, to him, it did not seem that five minutes had elapsed since they had started. The half-hour had indeed passed quickly!

"Come," said Wirt, opening the coach door; "here we are."

Carefully, still carrying the girl in his arms, for though her senses had returned, her strength had not, Kelford descended to the pavement.

Then, for the first time, Kelford discovered that he was in front of his own house on Michigan avenue.

"Why, Wirt—" he said, in surprise.

"It's all right; carry the girl in; I'll explain every thing to your aunt, the old lady."

Wirt had previously settled with the hackman; so he sprang up the steps. Kelford gave him his latch-key, and he opened the door.

Kelford carried Pearl up-stairs to his own room, and laid her upon the sofa.

"You are better, dear?" he said, tenderly, as he bent over her, and smoothed back the damp hair from her forehead.

"Yes," she said, slowly, and glancing into his face with eyes full of love.

In a few minutes, Wirt, attended by Mrs. Kelford, Edmund's aunt, and a host of servants, comprising all that were in the house, from the coachman down to the stable-boy, entered the apartment, bearing blankets, pitchers of hot water, and various other articles that could be procured on the spur of the moment, and were supposed to be useful in a sick-room.

Pearl looked a little dismayed at the entrance of the motley crowd, but an encouraging pressure of her lover's hand restored her.

Wirt, in a few brief words, had explained the position of affairs to Mrs. Kelford, and that worthy lady, burning with a desire to show her skill upon something better than a sick poodle, entered upon the task of restoring the half-drowned girl with joy.

First, all the gentlemen were turned out of the room, much to Kelford's discomfiture and Pearl's dismay, for the presence of her lover was like life to her.

Then Pearl was undressed and put to bed between the warm blankets.

Mrs. Kelford, an excellent woman at heart, bustled about her in true motherly style, and all the while she sung the praises of her handsome nephew, until Pearl felt ready to cry for joy.

Then all the servants were turned out as the males had

been, and Mrs. Kelford, turning down the gas, sat down by Pearl's bedside in an easy-chair, to watch her charge.

In vain Pearl protested that she did not want to be so much trouble; Mrs. Kelford was as firm as a rock, and Pearl, wearied at last, and with happiness swelling all through her little heart, sunk into tranquil slumber—a bright smile on her pale face, and on her lips the name of the man she was now conscious that she dearly loved.

Meanwhile, Wirt and Kelford had adjourned to the library, Kelford's snuggery, and there, with a couple of good cigars, discussed the events of the last hour.

"What the deuce put it into your head to have the girl brought here?" Kelford asked.

"So as to give you a chance to win her, of course," Wirt replied. "If she goes out of this house Pearl Cudlipp, and not Mrs. Kelford, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"But her folks will be anxious about her; doubtless they are so already."

"I'll go this very night and tell them that she is safe, and where she is."

"But I'm not sure that the girl loves me well enough to marry me."

"So much the better, then, that I brought her here. If she doesn't love you now, you'll have a chance to *make* her do so. Ed., if you don't win her, you don't deserve to have her at all."

"But suppose—"

"Don't suppose any thing!" interrupted Wirt. "To use the classic saying, 'go in and win.'"

"If I thought I *could* win—"

"You never will, unless you try; that's a moral certainty."

"I will try," said Kelford, decidedly; "to-morrow I'll urge my suit again, but will not force her to an act which her heart does not approve. If she does not love me for myself alone, I shall not accept a hand given in gratitude or fear." He spoke earnestly.

After some few more words, the friends parted, Wirt to proceed to Pearl Cudlipp's friends, who, he knew, were then anxiously awaiting her return, and Kelford retiring to rest. His slumbers that night were pleasant, for he dreamed only of the girl he loved so well.

In the morning Pearl had quite recovered, much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Kelford. That worthy lady had sat and dozed all night long in the easy-chair by the side of the girl's bed.

After breakfast, Kelford seized an early opportunity to speak to Pearl upon the subject that was nearest and dearest to his heart.

They were sitting in the parlor together.

Kelford had explained that it was his friend, Wirt's idea in having her brought where she was.

"Your aunt is such a dear, good woman," Pearl said, warmly. "I am not sorry that you did bring me here, for I should not have known her else."

"And now, Pearl, that I have you here, I feel reluctant to let you go again," Kelford said, imprisoning the little white hand within his own.

"Do you?" Pearl asked, shyly, yet not attempting to release the prisoned hand.

"Yes, Pearl; can you give some little hope? but—I never thought to ask before—why did you attempt to commit suicide last night?"

"Why, I did not!" said Pearl, in astonishment.

"No!"

"I was thrown into the water by a tall man that passed me on the bridge; he turned, seized me suddenly, and before I could even scream I was falling through the air."

"What a strange attack! Pearl, will you not give me the right to protect you from any such danger in the future?" Kelford's voice was low and earnest.

"I should not refuse you again, for you saved my life, and—"

"If you do not *love* me, refuse."

"But—" and Pearl paused, shyly.

"But what?"

"I do love you!"

The words at last were spoken; and thus Pearl, the orphan girl, became the promised wife of Edmund Kelford.

No happier hearts in Chicago than theirs on that eventful day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LAST OF BERTRAND TASNOR

"She is dead!" muttered Bertrand, gloomily, as he knelt by Lurlie's side. "It was fated that I should be the cause of her death."

Moodily he gazed upon the fair features of the woman whose head he had once pillowed on his breast, and whom he had sworn to cherish and protect. The red lips that he had kissed so often in the old, old time were now colorless. The golden curls were dabbled with her life-blood, streaming free from the terrible wound in her head. The full, blue eyes were now staring vacantly at the ceiling.

"Poor girl," he muttered, and there was a sad expression in his voice as he spoke, "how different might her fate have been but for the Heart of Fire that she carried in her bosom! It was not altogether her fault that she has been what she has. Nature did much to make her evil, and circumstances did the rest. Men prate about honesty and goodness in this world, while half the time it is but good fortune. Expose these same good and honest men to the temptation by which others have fallen and they, too, will fall."

Then for a few moments he was silent, and gazed fixedly at the rigid features of the dead.

"There is a fascination in her face, though motionless in death, that I can not account for. I do not want to leave her. Bah! this is folly!" he cried, rising with a powerful effort of the will. "What the devil is the matter with me? I feel as if all my energy had deserted me. This is madness! I must get out of this. If I am found here with the body, they will accuse me of murdering her. In reality I am guilty, although my hand did not strike the death-blow."

Then Bertrand turned to leave the room, but, with his hand on the door, he suddenly paused.

"By Jove! I had nearly forgotten," he cried. "The bonds are in the safe in the other room. Aimee said that she carried the key of the safe with her. Why not search for the key, open the safe and secure the bonds? I do not need Aimee's help. Besides, I don't want her with me, anyway. These women never bring me luck. I can easily tell Aimee if she is waiting for me at the foot of the stairs, as she promised to be, that I will return again. The way of escape is clear. The bonds will be a fortune to me. I can hide in some obscure hole until the fuss of this affair blows over and is forgotten; then I can make my way to Europe. There, with this money, I can live like a king. With plenty of gold—that magic charm—in the gay European cities I can forget all the misery and crime that I have passed through. Now, first for the key."

Bending over the body, he proceeded in his search. A few moments and he held the key of the safe in his hands; a few moments more, the safe was open and the bonds within his hands; also some five hundred dollars in greenbacks.

"Fortune favors me at last!" he cried, in triumph. "This money, with what I already have, will keep me until I can find an opportunity of disposing of the bonds without detection. For about the fourth time in my life I am in possession of a fortune. Let me try this time to take care of it and not lose it like a fool. All goes well with me; my luck has turned. It's about time, for I've had enough ill-fortune within the last few years to do for a man's whole lifetime."

Carefully Bertrand secured the bonds in an inner pocket in his coat, then buttoned it up securely.

"Aha!" he cried, in glee, "who could guess that this common dress conceals a fortune? It is in my grasp, and this time I'll hold it. The devil himself shan't wrest it from me. I suppose I ought to thank my patron, down below, for this streak of luck. It's the first gleam of light that has beamed on my pathway for some time. Now to get out; quietly, if I can, and without seeing any one, but I suppose that that infernal woman will be on the watch for me."

Then Bertrand opened the door.

A sudden surprise greeted him, and it was not welcome.

Aimee stood before the door, her hand raised to knock. Behind Aimee stood a man.

Bertrand caught one glimpse of the man's face; then he reeled back as though he had been stricken by a heavy blow.

The face of the man seemed to him like the face of one risen from the dead.

He could hardly believe his senses.

He, who there stood before him, was one whom the robber and murderer had hanged to a tall cottonwood, by the Arkansas, in the war-time, when, as a guerrilla captain, he had done many a deed of blood.

The man was Amos Kenwood, the mate of the Michigan. He had called to see the widow of his late captain on some business connected with the propeller.

Wild was the expression of fierce delight that came over Kenwood's face as he beheld the man whom he had sworn to kill.

With a single exclamation hissed through his clenched teeth: "Remember Arkansas!" Kenwood sprang upon him.

Bertrand, recovering from his surprise in an instant, was ready for his foe.

A moment the two men swayed to and fro, tightly locked together. Aimee, with fear-stricken eyes, too frightened even to cry out, gazed upon them, terrified.

With a desperate effort, Bertrand swung Kenwood around; the mate of the Michigan was hardly a match for Captain Death; then, with a cunning wrestling device, he broke Kenwood's hold and sent him spinning back into the room.

With a cry of triumph, Bertrand sprang down the stairs at breakneck speed.

Kenwood, recovering from the shock, drew a revolver and hurriedly aiming at the flying man, fired.

The ball, too high for mortal wound, tore through Bertrand's shoulder, but the shock caused him to miss his footing, and headlong he rolled down the stairway. At the bottom he remained, all doubled up in a heap, motionless.

Kenwood descended the stairs.

Bertrand Tasnor was dead; not by the ball of Kenwood's revolver, though; in falling, he had broken his neck.

By accident, not by the malice of a foe, the devil had claimed his own.

Our story is ended.

Rick and the two roughs, Goff and Bedford, are even now living in Chicago, and are well known to the police as three of the most dangerous characters within the limits of the Garden City.

Edmund and Pearl were married, and the millionaire and the sewing-girl have never had cause to regret the hour when first they saw and loved each other.

Beneath the same marble shaft that marks the grave of Captain Middough lies the mortal remains of the woman whom, in life, he loved so well—Lurlie, the strange girl, who with the face of an angel, had the passions of a demon, and a heart, not of flesh, but of fire.